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V I O L E T O S B O R N E .

VOL. II.

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VIOLET OSBORNE.

BY

THE LADY EMILY PONSONBY,

AUTHOR OF

“THE DISCIPLINE OF LIFE,”

“MARY LYND SAY,”

&c., &c.

“ . . . All worldly joys go less
To the one joy of doing kindnesses.”
GEORGE HERBERT.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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VIOLET OSBORNE.

CHAPTER I.

“He praised his lucky stars that in his place
He never found neglect nor felt disgrace ;
To do his duty was his soul’s delight,
This his inferiors would to theirs excite,
This his superiors notice and requite.
To either class he gave the praises due,
And still more grateful as more favoured grew.”

CRABBE.

THE next morning dawned in brightness.
It was again a frost, not a hard but a
brilliant frost. The sky was blue and
clear, the sun shone on the frosty trees
and sparkled on the rimy grass, and
again Violet peered out of the windows
to see what could be seen.

Across the grass plot the Cottage (for it was but a cottage, though a large one) looked out on the high road, on each side of which stood clumps of trees; but between the clumps a good view of the distant country was to be seen—the hill and dale, broken banks and fertile fields, that Violet remembered. And far away, fading into the sky, were soft rounded blue hills, making a background to the scene.

Violet's soul, which, on the evening before, had felt so "cabined, cribbed, confined," swelled and expanded as she gazed.

"Oh! papa, this is lovely, is it not?" she said in ecstasy. "Didn't I say truly?—didn't I remember well?—shall we not be happy here?"

“Yes, darling,” he said cordially, looking into her dark blue eyes, and feeling that, while they shone, as at that moment they did, he must be happy.

She occupied an hour or two of the morning in *disarranging* the furniture, in setting out such of her own and her mother’s pretty things as had escaped from the spoil, and in giving a look of home and comfort to the house. It was quite fresh and clean, and, while the country without looked so tempting, Violet could close her eyes to the fact that the rooms were small and low, and the windows few and far between.

Before this occupation was well concluded, her father called her to walk with him, and, hopeful and happy, she obeyed.

They strolled forth, and certainly Violet's vivid fancy had hardly beautified the beauties of the neighbourhood—beauties tranquil, homelike, and thoroughly English, yet with just that degree of *markedness* in the features which gives picturesque and even poetic colouring to a spot. There were the nests of cottages, which looked so bright and peaceful that a thought of sin or sorrow connected with them was out of place. There was the old church, a very beautiful specimen of early Gothic; and close beside, the old brick almshouses, the ancient inhabitants of which, in a dress the perfection of neatness, sat at their doors.

A feature which she did not remember was a new schoolhouse, very tastefully though simply built; and this feature,

speaking as it did of care and thought exercised over the place, and the intrusion of modern notions and maxims, was not unwelcome to her.

She nodded to the old men and women, turning her bright beautiful face towards them as she passed, and received in return bows and curtsies so respectful, that she walked on happier and happier, picturing all the kind smiles she might give and thoughtful deeds she might do.

Though brought up in London, Violet was a great walker ; and Mr. Osborne, who never went on a horse or in a carriage when his own legs could bear him, was a perfect companion for her vigorous youth. They wandered on, in and out, groping through lanes, and groping out of

them again ; and without leaving the sphere of the village found beauties sufficient to satisfy the most fastidious mind.

“Now for a quick walk along the high road and home again!” said Mr. Osborne, and passing their own cottage they climbed a steep hill on the opposite side.

This hill enlarged the field of their observation. It took them by surprise. Though in fact a part of the same vale, it was presented under features so new and so interesting that they stood still to gaze. One large white house was distinctly seen, not a mile off, and from the columns of smoke that arose from a bank of trees in another spot, it was to be surmised that there were more.

“Here, boy, whose house is that?” inquired Mr. Osborne of a big boy in a smock frock, who passed whistling down the road.

“Ask me no questions and I’ll tell ye no lies,” he said surlily in his broad dialect, and walked on.

Mr. Osborne was nettled; the boy looked pertly back, and Violet smiled and shook her head at him.

As if mollified by that kindly smile, he paused and said,

“I be’s in a hurry, mum, but there comes the parson, and *he’ll* speak, I’ll be bound.”

With his thumb he pointed to a portly gentleman who was slowly approaching on the other side, and with the same outstretched thumb pointing to his cap,

by way of a bow, he set off again, not so hurriedly, however, but that he paused more than once to see what took place.

Violet looked curiously towards the approaching rector. In the course of their walk she had expressed to her father her great desire to know a really good clergyman. "Such a one as one reads of," she said; and as she looked at the beautiful church and pretty parsonage, she felt as if here it would be to be found.

He was a portly man of about fifty, and Violet, who had set her heart on a spare and thin one, was disappointed; but she had hardly had time to feel her disappointment before the beaming benevolence of his countenance took her heart by storm. In vivid fancy she was already

looking up to him as her wise friend and kind adviser.

He came up to them very courteously, paused, took off his hat, and said,

“Strangers, I believe?”

“Strangers now, but not to be so long,” said Mr. Osborne, as courteously.

“I am Mr. Osborne, who arrived last night, and this is my daughter.”

The rector took off his hat again, bowed to Violet, and then said—

“It may be agreeable to you to know the person you are addressing. My name is Pope. I am the rector of this parish. I have lived for many years, and trust to live many more in this spot, which I have no doubt you will agree with me in denominating a paradise on earth.”

“Yes, it is lovely!” said Violet, warmly.

“My lot is an enviable one, no doubt,” he continued. “I have good reason to say I am content.”

The beaming expression of content again charmed Violet.

“What a good and happy man!” she thought, and sighed.

“I just now inquired of one of your parishioners the name of the owner of that house,” said Mr. Osborne, pointing, eager to satisfy his curiosity, to the large white building in the vale; “he somewhat pertly declined to answer, but referred us to you. Can you give me the information I want.”

“Indeed!” said Mr. Pope. “Country manners, Mr. Osborne, are not those of the metropolis, but I am thankful to say the manners of our people on the whole

are good. We are most fortunately placed here, something of modern refinement mingling with the simplicity of more primitive times."

"I did not mean to complain of them," Mr. Osborne said, smiling; "I only wished to refer my question to you, if you will kindly answer it. Whose house is that?"

"As the morning is chilly, perhaps you will allow me to walk on with you, though I agree with you in thinking our view over these hills and dales an attraction more than compensating for a slight degree of cold."

He raised his hands over his brows, looked with a smile of broad satisfaction on the attractive scene, and then put his portly frame in motion.

“Bless the man,” said Mr. Osborne, not very respectfully to himself, “will he never give me an answer?”

“You will not answer papa’s question,” Violet said, smiling. “Is there any mystery about that house?”

“Oh! by no means, Miss Osborne. I was about to answer you, and you could address your inquiries regarding the neighbourhood to no better person than myself. I am, I am thankful to say, on good terms with all. Such I believe to be the duty of a good pastor, and I have endeavoured to act up to my duty in this point as in others.”

Violet looked at her father. He made an answering sign of despair, but the communication which could not be obtained as a reply came, at last, in the

form of a narration. Walking slowly on, Mr. Pope observed :

“The proprietor of a large part of our village is Lord Ashford. He is also the owner of that house, and the country on the eastern side; the ground on which you tread at this moment, and a smaller property lying to the west, belongs to Sir William Hamilton. You can observe the smoke of his chimneys among the trees yonder.”

“Yes, and a good deal of it,” said Mr. Osborne, smiling. “Are they cooking a dinner for a dozen children?”

“Only one, Mr. Osborne. A young daughter of eleven or twelve years old; but there is a large establishment, and a wasteful one; no Lady Hamilton to order and control a household. Sir William

Hamilton is a peculiar character. I may certainly say so. A handsome man, a talented man, a lover of art, a fine ear for music; but still a peculiar character. He is, in short, rarely seen. We are on the best of terms. My sense of duty would never allow it to be otherwise; but he lives to himself alone."

"And Lord Ashford, has he a large family?" inquired Mr. Osborne.

"Not so. A sickly lady, never seen by the world in general, and a son of seventeen or eighteen years old, who is scarcely ever at home. The fact is, Mr. Vane is supposed to resent the neglect with which his mother is treated, and to condemn altogether his father's line of conduct. I say such is supposed to be the case, but Mr. Vane is a reserved and

silent youth, and I may say of him as I did of Sir William Hamilton, he lives to himself."

"You do not seem very fortunate in your neighbours," Violet remarked, with disappointment in her tone.

"We are so peculiarly blest, I am so singularly fortunate in every other point, that I do not allow myself to make such an observation. No doubt human nature is not absolutely perfect; and I believe even in the brightest lot some cloud may be seen; even Haman in his glory, as we know, had his Mordecai. Far be it from me, however, to suggest that such is my case. In answer to your observation, Miss Osborne, I merely reply that if there is a cloud in my sky, it proceeds from the absence of companionable quali-

ties in my neighbours; in those, at least, of rank and name. Lord Ashford is a peculiar character, so is Lady Ashford; decidedly so. Lady Ashford is a saint; perhaps it proceeds from circumstances, but she is without doubt a saint. Being so, she is decidedly unfit to be Lord Ashford's wife. Lord Ashford is an amiable man, cheerful in temper, and generous to wastefulness; but considered in a moral and religious light, he may be denominated a peculiar character. Without meaning to be censorious, I speak the common language of the world when I say so. If there be, however, objections to the human character of this region, there is none to the divine character of the landscape; from east to west," and he waved his hand, "no spot

or blemish. Surely Miss Osborne you must agree with me that mine is an enviable lot?"

"I am sure I do," Violet said, smiling.

"Situated in this sweet, secluded spot, at once adorned by the hands of God and man, my occupation in life a sacred one, my aim to do good, my taste to give happiness, surrounded by a peasantry attached to me by the ties of gratitude and respect, my lot is indeed an enviable one, and, as few men can say, *I am content.*"

As they walked through the village, Mr. Pope paused incessantly to call their attention to the beauties and advantages of the place; to the new schoolhouse, built by Lady Ashford and Mr. Vane

at *his* suggestion ; to the restorations in the old church, made by Sir William Hamilton at *his* request ; to the gardens neatly kept because *he* encouraged a taste for flowers, &c., &c.

Though her first admiration for his benevolent smile was somewhat damped, the courteous manners and kindly expressions of the rector emboldened Violet to make some requests to him. She was longing to be of use in her new world, and before they parted she told him so.

“If there is anything I could do,” she said, with warmth, “you have only to employ me, and I shall be thankful.”

“Thank you, Miss Osborne,” he replied with his broad beaming smile ; “but we

are so highly blest in this spot, that I should find it hard to say in what manner our condition could be improved. When you have lived a few weeks amongst us, you will agree with me in saying that you have found a paradise on earth."

"I did not mean any great thing," Violet said, eagerly; "I meant only such things as must always be useful. If you ever wanted any help in the school, or if you have any poor old men and women, or sick people, I should be so glad to visit them, and read to them."

"You are very good, Miss Osborne, but I am thankful to say that in this happy spot our wants are all supplied. I have been fortunate enough to find a first-rate schoolmistress, and lest any should

be neglected, I, in conjunction with a neighbouring clergyman, have made arrangements with a respectable person, who visits the sick in the manner you mention. You are very good, but I believe you will find that here you may rest on your oars."

Violet said no more. Mr. Pope accompanied her and Mr. Osborne to the door, expressed his intention of shortly calling on Mrs. Osborne, and putting himself and Mrs. Pope at her service; and then with a smile of unfeigned benevolence withdrew.

Mr. Osborne laughed as they entered the house, and merrily repeated to Mrs. Osborne the chief part of the conversation. Violet laughed too, but her heart was sad.

CHAPTER II.

“To each his suffering.”

GRAY.

AFTER luncheon Mr. Osborne set off on a five miles walk to the nearest large town. It was too far for Violet, had she been willing to leave her mother alone. She remained therefore at home, for Mrs. Osborne was still tired with her journey. She wrote a promised letter to Albert, and endeavoured to give a cheerful description of all around her, but there was no cheerfulness in her feelings.

The letter was finished, and she wandered

up the small stairs and over the small house, and again felt oppressed with its dimensions. She returned to the drawing-room, took a bit of work in her hand, and sat down in the window. But the morning's beauty had faded, and admiration in her soul was dead. The sun had disappeared, the sky was colourless, and a raw mist, promising an evening of rain, was hiding all but the clumps of leafless trees and the broad grass-plot from her view. A damp hand had been laid upon her heart, and all its spirit had evaporated. She saw herself condemned to a life of inaction in this small house and strange place, with no excitement or change but the society of Mr. Pope. She thought of all he had told her: the want of interest in all the characters he had

mentioned ; men bad or disagreeable ; a priggish boy, and a child.

Though when happy no fancy had power like Violet's to colour brightly, she could *discolour* to the same extent in her despondency ; and thus it was she pictured the characters described by Mr. Pope. The only person who excited an interest in her mind was the saintly Lady Ashford, and she, he had said, was sickly and never to be seen. She thought and thought upon her future till its gloom became unbearable, and then she reverted to the past ; and it rose before her at her call. She lived over it—over the past year, with its unspeakable happiness. But fancy travels swiftly, and a few seconds brought her to its close ; to that forbidden thought, that passionately for-

bidden recollection, her parting with Leicester ; to *that* which she had cast away.

A hand was laid upon her shoulder, a "Violet, darling!" softly breathed in her ear by her mother's gentle voice ; but, though soft, so unexpected was the touch that she started violently, and two large tears were shaken by the start from her eyes.

The quick movement which averted her head showed Mrs. Osborne that the tears were not to be observed, and she only continued quietly,

"I startled you, dear. I did not mean to do that. But why so idle, darling? It is not good for you."

"I have nothing to do, mamma," and she sighed.

“At Broadstairs, Violet, you longed for time to read. Why not read a little now?”

Violet rose and went to the book-case, already arranged with a selection of the very best of books. While she cast her eyes over it Mrs. Osborne sat down again by the fire.

“These books are all so old, mamma,” and Violet sighed again. “I know I ought to read them all, but I cannot fancy them now.”

“I daresay, dear; we ought to have brought a new novel for these first few days, but it is bad for us to be idle. Why not study your German?—you know you always meant to get it up again this winter. Do you remember how you and Albert talked of it at Broadstairs?”

“Yes, mamma, but I fancied things then, and now I don’t.”

Tears again gathered in her eyes, and sitting down near her mother, but shading her face from the light, she went on—

“I know you must think me very wrong, mamma, but I don’t think you *can* know what I feel. I am so disheartened, so disappointed with myself; I know I don’t think rightly or do rightly, and it makes me miserable, and yet I cannot do better. I am so utterly sick of life, and it seems such a long weary thing before me. There is a weight upon me, which I cannot, cannot shake off.”

“I think, dear, I do understand what you feel.”

“No, mamma, you can’t, because you

are good and resigned and patient, and you don't ever think of yourself ; and besides, mamma, you are quiet, and you can't guess what it is to have an unquiet heart that used to be satisfied, and now is not, gnawing within you. That is the very word," she added with alacrity, as if she was pleased to find it ; "it is a dull gnawing pain, something in my mind like a very great hunger that cannot be satisfied."

"I know, dear, I cannot feel as you do now," said her gentle and compassionate mother ; "for at my age the feelings are not so quick as at yours, and it would be grievous indeed if I did, when I have been taught for so many years ; but I was going to tell you, darling, that I think I can understand, because *once*,

I fancy, I felt just as you do now."

"Oh! mamma, when?" cried her daughter with interest; "I thought you had always been happy?"

"Always had many more blessings than I deserve, dearest, but I have had a great trial. It was when I began to know that I was deaf, Violet, and deaf for ever. You were only three years old then, and you cannot remember me different from what I am, but I *was* different. I was almost as lively once as you are, Violet."

"Oh! mamma, and was it such a dreadful blow?"

"It was, darling. I always think, even in Heaven, I shall remember the feeling of the day when I looked in my doctor's face and asked him if it was

hopeless. It was from a cold I foolishly caught when I had an earache; and I tried many, many things, and many physicians, and at last my own doctor advised me to be patient and to try no more. And then I looked in his face quite quietly, and I said that, if he told me it was no use to try, I *would* be patient, but that, if there was a hope, I did not mind what I suffered; I thought it my duty to suffer for my husband's sake and yours, darling; and he said he thought my duty was now to be patient. So I repeated more vehemently, 'Was there no hope?' And he looked grave and kind, and said, 'There is but little, and you may ruin your health.' I thanked him, and said, 'Then I would take his advice.' He

did not know—no one ever knew—what I felt then, and for months and years after. It left such a scar upon my heart, I always fancy I must wear it in Heaven.”

The excitement in Mrs. Osborne’s usually placid face was so strange, that Violet’s eyes were riveted upon it.

“Dear mamma, and I never knew—never thought,” and Violet rose and kissed her brow, and sat down again.

“No, darling, and you never would, only I thought it might help you to know it. It is long past now,” she resumed in her usual quiet way, “and I think only of my blessings, and the wonderful way in which God has made me happy through those very years I dreaded to think of. Though he cast

me off from a world I liked perhaps too well, he gave me a far better and more beautiful self, darling, in you; and I have my own calm happiness, and yours also. Twice blessed I am, and I can truly say that I am happier now than in my youth. Not so madly joyful, darling, but happier."

"And how did you become happy, mamma?"

And Violet looked eagerly in her mother's face.

"At first, dear, by trying not to brood over my loss; and that is what I want you to do. I was not very good at first, not near so religiously taught as you, and I did not do nearly so much as I might, or trust God as I ought; but I did wish to do right, to be as

good a wife as I could, and to bear it all as well as I could, and that was the first thing I tried. I tried not to feel that I was neglected, not to see how changed it was since people were glad to speak to me, not to resent it and mope over it. I tried to occupy myself, and make myself as pleasant as ever I could—and it did me great good. And gradually,” she said, and her voice lowered, “higher thoughts were put into my head, and I learnt to be thankful that God had afflicted me.”

Tears fell down Violet's cheeks, not from any lesson her mother taught her, but as she thought how little she had ever thought of her mother's trials, how wrapt she had always been in herself.

“There, dear, don’t,” said Mrs. Osborne, rising and stroking her head, “we must not be melancholy. I only wished to show you that it is not good to be idle.”

“I won’t, mamma,” Violet said with resolution, brushing her tears away and looking up with a smile. “What shall I do? Will you give me something to do?”

“Yes, dear, and Mrs. Osborne smiled also. “Will you become a milliner and make me a cap. Mine are growing old, and I was afraid to buy new ones, for we must be careful, darling, about our dress.”

“Yes, I suppose so, and I shall not mind that, I hope. Oh! yes, mamma, I will try, and I am so thankful to

have it to do. I must try and rival Madame Célestine, for all the world has always said that there are no caps like yours; and if I succeed, I must have Albert down to see," she added playfully; and with the spirit which she put into all her occupations, she went to her new employment, and was cheered by it.

CHAPTER III.

“This dull despair
Is the soul’s laziness. Rouse to the combat,
And thou art sure to conquer.”

ROWE.

THERE had been several days of bright morning frost, and they were followed by a day of incessant rain. It was such a day as had tried Violet’s temper, even in her old happy home, and beneath its influence her spirits sank to utter despondency. Remembering the conversation of the day before, she struggled hard to employ herself, and to conceal

from her parents what she felt. She read, she practised, she rearranged the books and the ornaments of the room; she looked over her clothes, and endeavoured to calculate how much she ought properly to spend in clothing. But still there was no heart in her occupations; the outward man was employed, but the inward was picturing a life made up of rainy days in that small house, and her excited fancy was shivering before the prospect.

All the long day through it rained; no villager passed by; the leafless arms of the trees waved before the wind, and the small drops pattered against the window; and Violet looked out, and looked around, and felt despair. To Mr. and Mrs. Osborne the change was as great as to her, but they bore it cheer-

fully. Mr. Osborne, like Violet, could not bear inactivity, but, unlike her, a small thing occupied him. He had always had a fancy for carpentering; he now determined to be the carpenter of his establishment, and this rainy day was employed in clearing out the shelves from a large cupboard, and preparing it for a carpenter's shop; making his arrangements with a care and forethought that occupied him entirely. Violet assisted him during a part of the day, but there was something of scorn in her heart; not for the employment itself, but for the cheerful and absorbed attention which her father gave; and again, as she sat alone at night, bitter tears fell from her eyes, and cold despair settled on her heart. The conviction that she was wrong, shame and disappoint-

ment in, and for, her in-submission, added their pangs, and she lay down and rose up, feeling as if the fount of youth and joy was dried up in her heart for ever.

Nor did the face of nature cheer her with its morning greeting. The violence of the rain was over, but a mist that was almost rain gave every prospect of another day of confinement and gloom. But many a cloudy morning turns out a fine day, and so it was on this occasion—morally, not atmospherically speaking.

Towards twelve o'clock Violet opened the window to prove to her mother that the damp mist was *not* rain. Looking out, she perceived Mr. Pope and a lady approaching the house. Mr. Pope was wrapped in a long cloak, and, as he

marched along with rapid, important steps, his lady companion was forced to trot by his side.

“Mr. Pope is coming to call, mamma,” Violet said to her mother, and internally added, with a sigh, “I never thought I should have been reduced to feel so glad.”

Mr. Pope entered pompously, and made his apologies for not having called the previous day. He then introduced his wife.

Mrs. Pope was a plump little woman, with a fair, fresh-coloured face, totally devoid of any expression but good temper. Mr. Pope had not chosen his wife, like Socrates, as a trial to his temper, but much more philosophically, as a solace to it. Mrs. Pope was Mrs. Pope in order

that she might admire him in those intervals when the voice of the world was necessarily dumb ; and she did it with all her heart. She could not forget that he had chosen her, the seventh penniless daughter of a penniless curate, to make her the comfortable wife of a comfortable rector, and she loved and honoured him with all the soul and all the intellect she possessed.

Leaving his wife to entertain Mrs. Osborne, Mr. Pope drew a chair near to the window where Violet was, and observed :

“My business is with Miss Osborne.”

Violet smiled and sat down ; and he then further observed :

“Without any flattery, Miss Osborne, you must allow me to say that you

sing and perform on the piano charmingly."

"I don't know who has spread such a report," Violet replied, laughing; "I have been well taught, but I ought to play much better than I do."

"You have answered a question I was about to ask. I felt convinced you had been well taught, but am glad to be assured of it. Of your performance I can speak from my own knowledge. You look surprised; allow me to explain myself. I was summoned yesterday evening to baptise the young child of a farmer who lives half a mile beyond you. It was, as you know, a most inclement night, and the summons was peculiarly inconvenient to me, as my horse had slightly injured himself the previous day. I un-

hesitatingly, however, complied with it; for I may say, Miss Osborne, without pride, that duty with me has been at all times a paramount consideration. On my return between nine and ten o'clock, the rain had abated, the moon struggled through the clouds, and I was rewarded for my exertions by a mild and pleasant walk, singularly refreshing after the confinement of the day. I walked leisurely, and as I drew near to this house I was gratified by hearing strains of music; I paused, and drew as near as I could without intrusion, and I must repeat, Miss Osborne, that I consider your performance charming."

"I am very glad you think so," Violet said, not ill-pleased to receive again the sweet incense of admiration, "and

I ought to thank you for your compliment."

"No compliment, Miss Osborne; but indeed in my position I might not have said so much on the subject, had I not a further object in view. You were kind enough to offer me your services on the first occasion we met"

"Yes, indeed," Violet interrupted, eagerly, "I should be so glad to be of use."

"Permit me to proceed, Miss Osborne. We are in this favoured spot so singularly blest, that at the moment in which you spoke to me I was unable to call to mind one single point in which your services—the services of any person—were needful; and indeed it was not until I returned home last night and was revolving in my mind, as is my custom,

my many responsibilities, that a suggestion offered itself, and, after some consideration, was adopted. You are no doubt aware that it is the duty of those in my situation to see that the Church service is decently performed. A duty not always respected, but one which I, among my many other duties, have made it my study to respect. I believe I might appeal to the whole neighbourhood to bear me out in this observation. But perfection, Miss Osborne, is difficult to attain; and as it is my wish and practice always to own a failure, if it so happen that one exists, I confess to you that our psalmody is not so perfect as might be desired; and I regret this the more as Sir William Hamilton has a fine ear for music, and that ear may possibly be occa-

sionally offended. When I returned home last night, Miss Osborne, the tones of your voice haunted me, and an idea was suggested to me that you might—having kindly made an offer of your services—undertake the office of musical teacher to my school-children. I say no more, but lay my request before you for your consideration.”

Violet’s eyes sparkled. It was indeed a new employment; but she was not one to be daunted by difficulties, and the joy of being relieved from the burden of herself made her hear the proposal with rapture.

“I shall be too happy to agree to it, if I can,” she said cordially. “I must tell you that I have never thought about teaching at all, and it may be more

difficult than I suppose ; but I can but try, and I shall do my best to succeed. I am so much obliged to you for taking me at my word and coming to me."

Mr. Pope was extremely gratified. Instead of being obliged, he found he was the obliger, and it was the position he preferred. He thanked her with great condescension, and then added,

"Your kindness, Miss Osborne, emboldens me to request that you will allow me to install you in your office this day. The fact is, Sir William Hamilton is at present absent, and it would be highly gratifying to me could I surprise him by a more perfect psalmody on his return. The weather is not very propitious, but if you are not delicate, which you must allow me to observe that I cannot

suppose possible" (glancing with a bow at the bright colouring of her cheeks), "I would ask you to accompany me and Mrs. Pope to the church and to the school. I will then introduce you to your pupils, and you can make such arrangements as you think proper."

Violet readily acquiesced, and left the room, kissing her mother's brow as she passed and saying,

"Mr. Pope will tell you, mamma, what I am going to do."

Mr. Pope came forward accordingly, and, standing with his back to the fire, made a narration to Mrs. Osborne of all he had thought, said, and planned, more shortly expressing his gratification in Violet's acquiescence. Of the plan itself Mrs. Osborne heard nothing, for though Mr.

Pope's voice was loud, a narrative always made her deaf; but she had read her daughter's pleasure in her speaking face, and she said a few gratified and grateful words.

Mr. Pope stroked his chest, and looked more broadly benevolent than ever.

"I am sure I don't know where you get your thoughts," said his admiring wife; "they always are so good."

"I am not aware," he replied, "that I am indebted to anything but my own reflection. I by no means pretend to inspirations, nor am I much in the habit of seeking suggestions from others. I own that I am singularly fortunate in the success of my ideas, as has been proved to-day."

CHAPTER IV.

“ Yet for me
Life's morning radiance hath not left the hills,
Her dew is on the flowers.”

The Prelude.

VIOLET returned ready for her walk, and set forth with Mr. and Mrs. Pope. The dense fog, that was almost rain, still continued, and, for a great part of the way, Mr. Pope apologized for the occurrence of bad weather in his parish, assuring her that she would find it a rare misfortune. Rainy seasons did occasionally prevail; he by no means pretended to an exemption

from the usual uncertainties of an English climate; frosts, snows, fogs even, did at intervals occur, but she would, after a short experience, discover that bad weather was the exception, and that she had truly made her home in a pleasant place.

In passing along the village he touched again on the information given during their first meeting; his suggestions for the school-house and the cottage gardens, &c., and so conversing they reached the church. It was a beautiful old parish church, and had been repaired on the outside with good taste. Within, taste had not penetrated. Circular pews filled the whole body of the nave and aisles, and three pews of an enormous size—one of which stood half in and half below the step into the chancel—were not only shut

in by high palings, but also by brass rails and dull thick red curtains. A gallery, also curtained off, held the organ, and organ and gallery together hid the west window, which had great beauty in its shape.

Of want of beauty, however, Mr. Pope did not think. He took off his hat as he entered the church, and then began to converse very freely; naming the owners of the different pews, and describing every alteration that had been made under his auspices.

Violet made an inquiry as to the pew to be allotted to her father. Mr. Pope shewed her a seat which had been occupied by the last owner of their cottage, but as it was near the door, offered in its stead a place in his own roomy pew; one

of the three fortunate possessors of palings, railings, and curtains.

“This pew is occupied by Mrs. Pope, and any friend who comes to us for the enjoyment of our delightful neighbourhood; but I assure you we are seldom pressed for room, and I shall be most happy to accommodate Mr. and Mrs. Osborne. You, Miss Osborne, will naturally have your seat in the gallery.”

“Is your congregation large? Is the church crowded?” Violet asked.

“With two exceptions, Miss Osborne, all is as it should be. My parishioners are duly sensible of the importance of public worship, and were they not so, would be reluctant to be wanting in attention to me. Nor should I perhaps say two exceptions. Sir William Hamilton is

an occasional attendant with his daughter; after our new arrangements, I anticipate also a decided change in that quarter. That seat," pointing to Lord Ashford's, half of which was in the chancel, "is, I regret to say, always empty."

"Does not Mr. Vane go to church?" Violet asked in surprise.

"Mr. Vane is seldom at home; when at home he certainly attends public worship; but he does not occupy that seat. Mr. Vane has peculiar opinions, and expresses a decided objection to occupy his father's pew. When present at our service, he sits in this pew, commonly called 'the stranger's seat.'"

Violet felt considerable curiosity regarding this priggish boy, whose opinions, and

dissent from the opinions of his father, were thus publicly expressed; but she asked no more questions, and followed Mr. Pope to the organ gallery.

The organ was a good one, but had been disused for many years; a small grinding organ having been thought preferable both by Mr. Pope and his congregation. It had, however, been occasionally used by private persons, and had lately been set in order at Mr. Vane's expense. Mr. Pope began to blow, and, while he blew, Violet had nothing to do but to play and to admire. As the organ was in his parish, Mr. Pope admired also; and then, having made a few arrangements for her comfort during the hours of instruction, begged to be allowed to introduce her to her pupils; she could

afterwards, he said, appoint for instruction such hours as she pleased.

Violet and Mrs. Pope followed him to the school. The children rose noisily as they entered, and curtseyed low; and it was not till the noise had subsided, and Mr. Pope had called "Sit down, children!" that through the maze of curly heads Violet's eyes fell on an old acquaintance.

"Miss White, Miss Osborne is kind enough to call and see our school," said Mr. Pope; and blushing and smiling, Amy White came forward to meet her benefactress.

The unexpected sight carried Violet far from the present, and it was with a shock that she was transported to an old time. She became very pale, and said, with great effort,

“You here, Amy! How is this?”

“Did you not know? Did not Mr. Leicester tell you?”

“No,” Violet replied faintly. The pang of the sudden mention of his name was more than she could bear unmoved.

“I will tell you another time,” Amy said quickly, reading in her speaking countenance the emotion her words had produced, though referring that emotion to a different cause. And turning to Mr. Pope she asked, “What class she should call up?”

He declined the hearing of a class, and proceeded to inform her wherefore they were come, begging her to desire the children to sing the National Anthem.

“Your experienced ear will no doubt

be able to select such voices as you will have most pleasure in training," he observed to Violet.

Ashamed of her agitation, Violet had already recovered herself; but had she not done so, the discordant twang of the voices as they performed "God save the King," must have driven every lingering spark of feeling from her breast.

"Not bad," said Mr. Pope, when they had finished. "I have had especial pains bestowed on the National Anthem. I am loyal, and I wish to make my parishioners loyal also. Will you be good enough, Miss Osborne, to make your selection at once?"

Violet, however, boldly declined so summary a proceeding, and begging to be left with Miss White, she said she

would make a selection after further trial.

He demurred. Violet saw that now or never she must emancipate herself from thralldom, and good-humouredly persisted. Her persuasive powers none could resist ; and she at length succeeded in doing as she chose.

He and Mrs. Pope departed. As he went he promised to send her the two boys who had hitherto accompanied the grinding organ with their voices.

The style of music admired in Hollywell Church was this. Two boys endeavoured with their singing to drown the grinding organ, and the performer on the grinding organ was equally desirous to throw their singing into the shade.

The materials from which her choir was to be formed were not at first sight pro-

mising ; but Violet had the gift of the good fairy, Order, and she felt no despair in her task. One girl she discovered whose voice was sweet and clear, and the boys' loud voices, when softened, might, she thought, become invaluable. A selection of four girls was made, with which, added to the two boys, she resolved to be content ; and having appointed an hour on the following morning, which was Saturday, and a holiday, for a first lesson, and having completely won the hearts of all by her sweet smiles, kind words, and cordial manners, she dismissed them, interested and happy.

When her business was completed, Amy begged her to visit her mother, and conducted her through a neat little

kitchen to a neat little parlour. Though small and low, it looked so clean and bright, and contrasted so strongly with even the best of the London lodgings they had occupied, that Violet could hardly restrain some words of congratulation; but Mrs. White was a grumbler, and her face was sour as she said:

“Good morning Miss Osborne; we had expected a visit before now; we began to think you did not choose to enter so humble an abode.”

“I never knew you were here, Mrs. White,” Violet said quickly. “I never was so surprised as when I saw Amy. How was it, Amy? How came you to leave Silcombe?”

“It was time to leave it when life

was in danger," Mrs. White began, but Amy took the explanation into her own hands.

"The air of Silcombe was so relaxing, that it was feared mamma would never be able to bear it. Mr. Vivian wrote to Mr. Leicester, to tell him the doctor's opinion, and it so happened that Mr. Leicester's friend had had an application for a schoolmistress from Mr. Pope on the very day he wrote. It was all quickly settled. I had then to write to Mr. Leicester," Amy continued, with a deep blush, "to tell him that we had no power to bear the expense of a removal. I wrote to ask his advice—to ask if I might dare to trouble you."

"Why did you not write to me?"

Violet said, with some asperity; "why was Mr. Leicester to be a better friend than me?"

"I only wrote to him to *advise*," Amy said meekly; "I must have asked *you* for help."

"And what did Mr. Leicester advise?" Violet asked, her curiosity considerably aroused; "he never mentioned you to me."

"Do you choose to read his letter?" Amy said, hesitatingly; "he speaks of something but you will not mind?"

"Of our change of fortune," she replied with calmness. "No, Amy, I shall not mind."

"He answered to mamma. There is the letter."

And Violet, as she took it, could scarcely restrain a smile at the characteristic discretion displayed by Leicester in addressing the answer to the daughter's letter to the mother:—

“DEAR MRS. WHITE,

“In reply to your daughter's question, I regret to say that I cannot advise an application to Miss Osborne at this moment. Some family circumstances have caused her much distress, and I should fear she would not be able to give to your request the attention she would wish. I enclose ten pounds, five of which remained in my hands from Mr. Osborne's last donation. Should this be insufficient, I beg you to let me know.

“When I have an opportunity, I will communicate to Miss Osborne your change of plans, and you may be assured she will never cease to take interest in your welfare and happiness.

“I remain,

“Sincerely yours,

“JOHN LEICESTER.”

“Clarges Street, December.”

Violet stood thoughtfully considering the letter for some minutes. Little as was in it, it pleased her, for she was the soul of the letter. She had been in all his thoughts as he wrote, and how dear that conviction was to her she even yet was not aware. When she roused herself, it was to say :

“And was it enough, Amy?”

“Yes, with a little care, quite enough,” she replied.

“That is to say,” observed Mrs. White, “that the chief part of the way we performed our journey in a waggon; a conveyance to which I confess I am not accustomed.”

“Oh! Amy, why did you not write to me?” said Violet.

“I could not,” Amy said.

“The rich,” said Mrs. White, sourly, “think the poor have nothing to do but to ask; but to be always asking is one of the trials of the poor, particularly of those who have known better days.”

“Yes, I am sure of that,” Violet said gently; “but when the poor know that

it is the happiness of the rich to give, they should not grudge them that happiness."

"You are very kind, Miss Osborne," said Amy; "and will you forgive me if I say how we have felt for *you*, and how I admire the way in which you bear"

Violet winced. She could not accustom herself to receive consolation from those she had consoled.

"Don't say that, Amy," she interrupted her quickly; "I have not borne our change of fortune well; and yet, when I see the troubles of others, I know I have very little to bear. We have been rich, and now we are not rich; but I hope still rich enough to be of use to others, and you must never

refuse to come to me if you are in want of anything I can give. Good-bye for to-day. I will soon come again."

She walked home with a buoyant step and a bounding heart. Though the mist spread over the landscape, there was sunshine within, which no outward influence could obscure. She thought she was happy because she had found her work, and found objects for her care; and undoubtedly this alone would have elated her, but there was a serene gladness in her eyes, which spoke of another source of happiness. Through the vista of the future she saw the link of interest that might unite again her life with that of Leicester. The mere sound of his name, and sight of his handwriting, seemed to bring her once more

into his presence, and to carry her daily work into the sphere of his knowledge. Not that this hope was consciously pictured by her fancy; she loosened in no degree the rein which bridled that portion of her dreamings; but there are unconscious as well as conscious imaginations, and the unpermitted fancy was enough to gild her life and invest every object with beauty.

CHAPTER V.

“ Sir, I am beholden to you
 For your sweet music

My ears were never better fed
 With such delightful, pleasing harmony.”

Pericles.

THE one cross in Mr. Pope's lot was the impenetrability of his two rich neighbours to his ministerial labours; but in the case of Lord Ashford, this cross weighed far less heavily on his mind than in that of Sir William Hamilton. There are persons who, whether by the open boldness of their conduct, or by some charm which counterbalances their evil doings, blind the

eyes and shut the mouths of censurers. Such was Lord Ashford. Though the carelessness of his moral and religious principles was so glaring that it might have been the theme of a child's comment, strange to say, it was commented on by few. His good qualities—a compassion that could not bear the sight of bodily distress, a profuse generosity, and a heartiness of manner which placed all who approached him at their ease—were more than sufficient to disarm criticism; and, under the kindly but not very respectful term of “the jolly old Lord,” the errors of his life were compassionately veiled. Mr. Pope owned the charm as well as his parishioners. He was on the most friendly terms with Lord Ashford, and though the weekly sight of his empty

pew kept alive the remembrance of his delinquencies, it was a calm consciousness, sighed away with the constant hope that better things would come.

With Sir William Hamilton it was different. Mr. Pope was on good terms with him, for, as he said himself, and he spoke truly, his sense of duty would not allow him to be otherwise; but the terms were cold and distant, and the occasional attendances at church were more galling to Mr. Pope's personal dignity than the total abstinence of Lord Ashford. Sir William Hamilton was a scholar, and a clever man, and a man of refined and cultivated taste; and as such, and being known to be such, his approbation would have been valuable, and his indifference was keenly felt.

It was felt, not as a censure, not as implying criticism on any of Mr. Pope's performances, but simply as a want of personal attention to himself. Of defect, of anything that could be subject to criticism, Mr. Pope did not dream; nor, considering his success with all other classes of his parishioners, was it likely that he should. His success with them was indeed considerable. They were in general a quiet, orderly race, very ignorant, and much led by custom and habit. For the most part, men and women, farmers and peasantry, went to church once on Sunday. Their fathers and grandfathers had done it before them, and they would have missed their daily dinner as soon as their weekly church. Mr. Pope's eyes might glance over his con-

gregation, and rarely, very rarely, with anything but exultation. It is true that the moral and intellectual nature bore but little part in the service.

Mr. Pope was not a preacher to rouse. He might vary his texts and his words, but his sermons ran constantly the same course. He preached on the moral virtues and their opposite vices; on the duty of contentment and gratitude; on the superiority of Christians to heathens, and on the superiority of his parish to most parishes in England. These were his favourite subjects; but such as they were they were listened to, especially the two latter, with sleepy complacency by his auditors. They were proud of him, and he was proud of them. They were proud of the pompous tones of his voice,

of the pompous decorum with which the service was performed, and most of all of the pompous step, slow and dignified, with which he passed from the vestry to the pulpit, accompanied by the tones of the grinding organ, and followed by the eyes of the whole church. And he was proud of the well-filled seats, the decent dresses, and most of all of the pride they took in him, and their devotion to his wishes.

But all this success and consequent pride was insufficient for perfect satisfaction while Sir William Hamilton was unimpressed. He had seen Mr. Pope in his church, he ought to have admired like the rest, but he did not. Nor, to do Mr. Pope justice, was this the only cause of his dissatisfaction. His religious

feelings were not deep, nor his religious standard high ; but, such as he was, he was very sincere. When he preached on the superiority of Christians to heathens, he preached from his heart. He exulted in being a Christian as much as if it were his own exclusive privilege, and the exultation did him honour. He had therefore a higher source of pain in Sir William's unchristian conduct, and that pain was truly felt.

For many years, however, this dissatisfaction had been borne in silence. If Mr. Pope was afraid of mortal man, he was afraid of Sir William Hamilton ; and it was only during the last year, only since the daughter, Ida Hamilton, was advancing in age, that the possibility of remonstrance had presented itself to him.

She had now entered her twelfth year, and the neglect of her religious duties might have serious consequences.

It was on the ground of the disadvantage to his daughter that Mr. Pope at length determined to base his remonstrance; and having once made up his mind to the plan of action, he acted upon it. A fortnight before the arrival of the Osbornes the deed was done.

Sir William received the remonstrance with the same imperturbable indifference with which he had hitherto met Mr. Pope's approaches. He showed neither resentment nor gratitude; he observed that, had his daughter ever expressed a wish for a more frequent attendance at church, no difficulty would have been made by him, and, in short, disposed of the

question with a kind of cool contempt.

Mr. Pope was nettled; he changed his ground of attack from the daughter to the father, pointing out the evil example Sir William was setting, not only to his own child, but to his dependents, and in fact to the whole neighbourhood. In his warmth he spoke well. He set forth plain truths, and expressed them forcibly. That they came home to Sir William, might be guessed from his reply; not that he was moved to warmth, but there was a sarcasm in his words which no longer spoke of indifference.

“He was surprised,” he said, “to find that Mr. Pope felt strongly on the subject; he had hitherto believed the harmony provided for the congregation

was intended rather to scare than to allure."

Mr. Pope was thunderstruck. That there was aught but beauty in the tones of his bellowing boys was an idea as new as it was offensive. He maintained, however, his dignity; observed that such considerations were unsuitable to the importance of the subject under discussion; and after begging Sir William Hamilton's pardon for his intrusion, politely and unruffled took his leave.

But the idea that had been suggested rankled, and again and again the possibility of an improvement in his psalmody was the subject of his reflections. Who could be the improver was the difficult question? The old schoolmaster who now turned the organ, and encouraged the

screaming boys, had the voice of an asthmatic raven; and the new school-mistress had unfortunately been taken before the idea of improvement was suggested, and without any questions as to the extent of her musical knowledge. That knowledge proved to be very small, and Mr. Pope was at a standstill. To a fortnight's perplexity the arrival of Violet Osborne put an end. She came, and Mr. Pope was restored to all his usual complacent contemplation of his own sphere and labours.

Sir William Hamilton was absent at the time of that arrival; and the three weeks that elapsed before his return, three weeks of unconquerable patience and unflagging energy on the part of the teacher, and three weeks of willing

attention on the part of the fascinated pupils, had already wrought a wondrous change in the psalmody of Holywell Church. Nothing beyond the simplest psalm-singing had as yet been attempted, but when above the soft notes of the organ, and the softened voices of the children, Violet's own voice rang out sweet and clear, even the fat and drowsy farmers, and even Mr. Pope himself, felt and owned that there was a change; a change that excited more reverent feelings than had yet been experienced during that portion of the service.

On the fifth Sunday, shortly before the second lesson, Sir William Hamilton and his daughter marched stealthily up the aisle, and concealed themselves in their pew. Mr. Pope's chest heaved be-

neath his surplice as he pictured the surprise he had in store ; and when, after the Litany, the first notes of the organ began, his very heart beat with emotions of exultation and expectation. The psalm was a well-known and simple one, but given with the correctness of one who understood what she sang ; and if Violet's voice had been his own creation, he could not have felt more covered with glory than he did, when, full and sweet, its notes and words penetrated through the church. If this elation could have received an addition, it was in the sight of a hand from Sir William's pew softly undrawing a curtain, and an uncovered head thrust forward to catch a sight of the gallery. Mr. Pope might live many years, and

many successes might yet be his, but nothing could ever equal the sensation of that moment. Sir William Hamilton was conquered; he was convinced of it, and *he* had conquered him.

When the service was over, Sir William, instead of escaping as was usual to him while the rest were still on their knees, or searching for their hats, sat in his pew, and, when the congregation had dispersed, followed Mr. Pope to the vestry.

“You must allow me to congratulate you, Mr. Pope, on the teacher you have engaged for your children. I have rarely heard a sweeter voice or a clearer intonation.”

Such were his opening words, and they fell like sweet music on Mr. Pope's ear.

“I am gratified, Sir William, that she

should receive your approbation," he calmly replied, showing no sign of the heaving pride within.

"It occurred to me during the service," Sir William continued, "that she might be able to instruct my daughter. I am extremely anxious to secure a person of taste for that purpose. Will you be good enough to tell me her name and her abode?"

"Her name is Miss Osborne. She is the daughter of the ruined banker who has taken Farmer Barton's cottage. You will probably remember the circumstance. She willingly consented to the proposal I made to her to instruct my school-children; but whether she would be willing to undertake the office you propose, I am totally ignorant."

“That shall be my affair,” replied Sir William, calmly. “I must consider further. I thank you,” and bending his head in salutation, he withdrew.

The consideration given brought Sir William Hamilton to Mr. Osborne’s on the following morning. Violet was dilligently practising, Mrs. Osborne was writing her letters, when the door was thrown open, and he was announced. Possessed with the idea that Violet was a musical teacher, no word that Mr. Pope had said had undeceived him; and though startled by her grace and beauty as she rose up on his entrance, he proceeded to his business without delay.

“You will pardon my intrusion, madam,” he began, stiffly bending his head to Mrs. Osborne, “but having had the plea-

sure of hearing your daughter's voice in church yesterday, I am anxious to ascertain whether it would be convenient to her to assist my daughter in her practice. She may command any remuneration she pleases."

His utterance was slow and clear, and Mrs. Osborne heard every word, but the sense scared her. Her colour rose, and she turned her eyes on Violet with a look of shame and apology.

Had her mother not been by, Violet might have felt as she did; but being anxious to relieve her, she looked at her with a smile of amusement, and coming forward towards Sir William, said :

"I am sure I should be glad to assist your daughter, if I could; but I should tell you, perhaps, that I am not a

regular teacher. I should not, I hope," she continued, blushing and smiling, "be ashamed of it if I was; but I am not, and you must not talk of remuneration to me."

He looked from one to the other, till he had fully mastered the extent of his mistake, then awkwardly said:

"I beg your pardon."

His extreme awkwardness in this discovery revealed how much of shyness had originally led to his withdrawal into himself. His stiff cold air was probably more of a habit than a manner.

After a moment's thought, he said, "I beg your pardon," a second time; and bowing, appeared to be on the point of taking his departure, when Violet spoke again.

"You must not think we are offended," she said. "I am sure, though I do not know Miss Hamilton, that I shall be very glad if I can be of use to her."

She looked at her mother, to desire her to speak, and Mrs. Osborne said :

"I am sure my daughter will ;" and moving her hand towards a chair, added, "will you sit down for a moment?"

He obeyed. And then for the third time said—

"I beg your pardon. I suppose I misunderstood Mr. Pope. I should not otherwise have presumed to intrude in this way."

"Pray say no more," said Mrs. Osborne. And Violet added :

"I assure you I shall be quite as glad to be of use to Miss Hamilton as

if I was a teacher ; but I should be afraid she was beyond my powers.

“ My daughter has been tolerably well taught,” he replied ; “ but what I am anxious to secure is a person of taste to guide her taste. To play easily is a common accomplishment ; to play correctly, and with understanding, a rare one. In what I heard yesterday, Miss Osborne, you will forgive me for saying it, I discovered that correctness of time, and clearness of touch, which shows a taste for music both natural and cultivated. If you are sincere in what you say, if you would be good enough occasionally to allow my daughter to practise with you, I should be truly obliged. If you will allow me, I will send her to call upon you, and you will then better

judge whether her society will be distasteful to you."

"I am sure it will not; anything I can do, I am so glad to do," Violet said, in her cordial way, speaking from her heart.

He bowed and thanked her. Bowed again to Mrs. Osborne, and for the fourth time begged her pardon, and withdrew.

CHAPTER VI.

“God hath so constituted our nature that in the very flow and exercise of the good affections there shall be the oil of gladness.”

CHALMERS.

THE following morning, while Violet was practising, she was drawn to the window by the sound of the quick canter of a pony down the road, and then its pause at the cottage door. On looking out she saw a little pony of the palest chestnut, and on its back a young girl in a large Sir Joshua hat, with dark thick curls falling in masses to her waist. A grinning country boy, in a kind of livery, came

running behind. Violet guessed at once that it was Miss Hamilton, and without waiting for a summons, flew to the door and opened it. As she stood there bright and beautiful in the sunshine, smiling at the young stranger, a mutual attraction took place; the child leapt from her pony, hurried as fast as her petticoat permitted to Violet's side, and put up her face to be kissed.

"You are Miss Hamilton, I guess?" Violet said, smiling and playfully.

"Yes. Papa sent me. He told me you would teach me to sing. Will you?"

"We will talk about that. Will you come in?" and she led her into the drawing-room.

Ida Hamilton was between eleven and

twelve. She was well-grown for her age, and on a large scale; but her expression was childish. Without great beauty, her face was pretty and attractive. Her features were tolerably well-formed, her eyes large and dark, and her hair beautiful. The cast of her countenance was not lively or intellectual. There was no deficiency, but intellect was not the predominant quality. A soft beseeching look pervaded every feature, and spoke of a nature whose delight was to give and receive affection. The expression was winning and touching, but wanting in variety.

On entering the room, seeing Mrs. Osborne, who looked at her with her gentle smile, Ida walked to her, and put up, or rather put down, her cheek to

be kissed. It seemed her natural form of greeting.

She then returned to Violet, and said :

“Papa sent me.”

“I am very glad to see you,” Violet smilingly and encouragingly replied. “And now tell me, what can I do for you?”

“Can you teach me to sing and to play? You sing so *beautifully*. I *wish* you would,” and she raised her dark eyes with an expression earnest beyond the occasion.

“Are you fond of music?”

“Yes, very ; and it is the *only* thing papa cares for me to do.”

Ida's manner of speech was much like that of a young lady in a dashed letter. She put pathetic emphasis on many of her words, and often very needlessly.

"You must remember I am not a regular teacher," Violet said. "I can't teach in a proper regular way; but, as I told your father, I shall be very glad to do what I can to help you on. I will begin to-day, if you like. Will you take off your bonnet and have a lesson?"

"No, I can't stay to-day, thank you. It is very near Tommy's dinner-time, and he is *so* hungry always. He would not like me to stay."

"No, no," Violet said, won by this little trait of kindly thought, "it would not do to interfere with Tommy's dinner. But what shall we do then? When can you come?"

"I want to know if you will come to me. Papa said I might ask. I should *so* like it."

“Are you quite alone?”

“I have got *ma bonne*; but she is very good-natured, and you would not mind her. Will you come to dinner to-morrow, and then give me a lesson after? I *wish* you would.”

“Well,” Violet said, after a little consideration, “I think I can. Miss Hamilton wants me to go to luncheon with her to-morrow, mamma. I think I will,” and she kissed her mother’s forehead.

“Yes, dear, if you like.”

“Then I will. And you say I am not to mind your *bonne*. You must take care she does not frighten me.”

“Oh! she won’t. She is not very clever. She is nothing but *ma bonne*. But I must go now, for Tommy begged

me not to stay long. He is so dreadfully hungry, he says!"

"Shall I give him a bit of bread, for fear he should faint?" Violet asked, laughing.

"Oh! bread is no good to Tommy," Ida said, with a look of earnest dismay; "meat is what he likes. He told me once that if he did not have proper meat, he thought he could eat *men*."

"Oh! how shocking!" Violet cried in affected horror.

"He did not mean anything bad," Ida said, pitifully; "only he has such a *wonderful* appetite. He is a very good boy, and very good to my pony. Good-bye. I hope you will let me love you," and she put up her face to be kissed.

Violet smiled her answer, and having

assisted her to mount her steed, stood nodding and smiling till she was out of sight.

“A dear child,” she soliloquized, as she re-entered the house; “and what a poor little lonely thing it must be, in that large house and with that stiff father! It will be a shame if I don’t try to make her happier; and better, too,” she added, remembering what she had heard from Mr. Pope of Ida’s neglected education. And her heart bounded at the thought of this new prospect of usefulness as Alexander’s might have done at the hope of a new world to conquer.

Violet’s time was now fully occupied. She taught her class three times a week, and too conscientious not to endeavour to make herself fit for what she had un-

dertaken, she devoted a considerable time daily to the study of music. But she had other employments. She could not take interest in the children of her class, without going beyond the hours of instruction. She inquired into their history, and their circumstances; and finally remembering they were her neighbours, and that she needed no leave from Mr. Pope to show a neighbourly kindness towards them, visited them and their parents in their homes. This step was no sooner taken, than, to a disposition like hers, occupations multiplied. She had no longer lavish wealth, but she had thought, and time, and intellect, and fingers at their service, and these were given. Many a small comfort was planned, many a small ailment cured, many a piece

of advice offered and accepted. If she saw a baby in an untidy dress, she could not rest till she had supplied it with a more seemly garment; she would replace the filthy finery of a child by a strong pinafore, and reject a piece of stained list from an old man's neck by offering a knitted comforter. When she had once entered on the career of active benevolence, she found no time for rest, and no time for regrets and repinings. She looked happy, and she was happy.

The following day was not her class day, and soon after twelve she went up to prepare for her walk to Boscombe, the house of Sir William Hamilton. When she came down she found that her father intended to accompany her.

Mr. Osborne, a man of the world, and

anxious in a mild way to observe the proprieties of life, had felt some doubts about this visit to the house of a widower; and though reluctant to oppose Violet's wishes, was determined at the least to satisfy himself that the existence of the *bonne* was not a myth.

They walked briskly to the door and rang the bell. The summons was answered by Ida herself; and a servant, who appeared at the end of the hall into which the door opened, seeing his young mistress, saved himself further trouble and departed.

"*How* good of you to come," she said, putting up her face. "I am *so* glad."

"This is my father," remarked Violet.

"Is Sir William at home?" asked Mr. Osborne, boldly.

“No. I am afraid not. I am *so* sorry. Do you want him?”

“I should like to rest a little while,” he replied, determined to enter the house and make his own observations. “May I come in?”

“Oh! yes, pray come in. Come to the fire; there is one in my schoolroom, if you don’t mind;” and closing the hall door, she ran across to a door on the opposite side, and led the way into her school-room.

It was a large and pretty room, looking into the garden, and one glance assured Mr. Osborne of the existence of the being of whom he was in quest. A fat old Frenchwoman was seated in a chair by the fire. She had but few teeth, and judging from her countenance, not

many more ideas. Still there she was, a piece of living propriety, and he felt empowered to dismiss his objections from his mind.

He sat down, and addressed the old lady in bad French. She replied in English equally bad. For a few seconds they conversed in this manner, each, as is customary, adhering obstinately to the language of the other; and then Mr. Osborne declared his legs to be rested, and took a polite leave. As he crossed the hall he saw the dining-room door open, and taking a cursory glance as he passed, further set his mind at ease, by perceiving that the table was only prepared for three persons.

Meanwhile Ida and Violet conversed, and before dinner was announced, Ida

had drawn from Violet a promise to call her Ida; a boon asked with great earnestness, and for the granting of which, after some hesitation, boundless gratitude was expressed.

After luncheon, mindful of her object, Violet proposed a music lesson and gave it, and after this again sat down while Ida exhibited her treasures. Touched by the lonely position of the young girl, she endeavoured—though with a fancy somewhat pre-occupied by her plans for the improvement and elevation of her mind—to enter with cheerful interest into her small pleasures. She was occupied in admiring a doll's slipper, sent from Paris by a friend of *ma bonne's*, a scarlet cloth shoe embroidered in beads of green and gold, when she was startled by the entry at

the window of a large greyhound. It came in with a flying leap, and bounding to Ida, saluted her by licking her hand. It was a beautiful creature, perfect in shape, and of a white whose brightness was dazzling.

"Oh! what a beauty!" Violet cried, springing up. "Whose is it?"

Ida had hurried to the window, and looked eagerly out, but now returned.

"It's Lionel's," she said; "but I don't see him."

"And who is Lionel?" Violet asked in some surprise.

"Don't you know?" said Ida, looking in her face.

"No, indeed. How should I?"

"Lionel is to be my husband." She spoke softly, and added, "I thought papa had told you."

“What do you mean, my dear Ida?” Violet said quickly. “I never heard anything so ridiculous. At your age people don’t talk of husbands.”

“Ah! but it’s true. It is indeed. Ask *ma bonne*. *She* knows it.”

But *ma bonne*, having indulged in a very good dinner, was taking a nap by the fire, and Violet did not feel desirous to disturb her.

“Well, I think it very ridiculous,” Violet repeated; “but do make it come to me,” pointing to the greyhound, which was now stretched in an expecting attitude upon the floor. “I never saw such a beauty. I should like to stroke its head.”

“I don’t think she will move. She’s expecting Lionel, I am sure.”

“What is its name?”

“Lionel calls her Angel, because she’s so white, and without a spot or a stain upon her. And that’s what he says we ought all to be.”

Surprised at this moral sentiment of Lionel’s, and her curiosity considerably excited, Violet was considering whether it was right to gratify it by making inquiries into this ridiculous subject, when the sound of a whistle was heard. Angel sprang out of the window, and Ida again hurried to look out. Violet retreated, and sat down.

“Angel is so fond of Lionel,” Ida remarked, with a sigh, as she leaned out.

“Why do you sigh?” Violet asked.

“Because I ought to be as good as Angel for Lionel to like me, or to let me like him. But I am not.”

“And do you like him very much?”

“Like Lionel!” She turned back from the window. “I *must* like him, because of what I told you; and besides, I can’t help it. Even when he is not kind, I can’t help it. He is so good, so very good.”

“Good, but unkind!” Violet said satirically, having already decided that Lionel was a young prig.

“Only to me not always kind; and it is for my good. He wishes me to be good as he is. Oh! how I wish I could. But there he is!” and she screamed. “He’s coming here after all.”

Violet sat still and expectant. Curiosity was not to be restrained, and she glanced out of window to see what object presented itself.

A young man, a very young man—half boy, half man—passed, and joined Ida at the further window.

“I was afraid you did not mean to come,” Ida said plaintively.

“Oh! yes, here I am. Do you want me?”

“I have got Miss Osborne to-day, and she is *so* kind. She has been teaching me to play.”

“I am very glad, and I hope you will take pains to improve yourself.”

“But, Lionel, she won’t believe what I say about *us*. She says it is ridiculous.”

“What do you mean by ‘about us’?” he said, like a teasing schoolboy.

“Why, I mean that you are to be my I mean that I am to be your wife. But it is true, isn’t it?”

"That must depend," he replied coldly. "I won't have anything to say to you if you are not good. If you tell stories, for instance, as you did, you know"

"Oh! Lionel, don't go back to that," Ida said, with tears in her voice.

"But I must go back to it. It is horrible! Good-bye, I can't stay to-day."

"Won't you come in and see Miss Osborne?"

"Is she there?" he asked, in a lower voice.

"Yes. Close. Hearing us," Ida whispered, but very audibly.

"Why did you not tell me? Making me like a bear! Yes, I will come in."

He put his foot over the low sill of the window and entered, Angel bounding in after him.

“I beg your pardon, Miss Osborne,” he said, with the formed manners of a man, “for behaving so unceremoniously ; but Ida never told me you were here.”

“I was here though, and listening,” Violet said, smiling.

“I beg your pardon. I did not know it. That is all I can say.”

“And if you wish for my pardon it is granted,” she said, laughing with careless ease. “I am not offended. What a beautiful greyhound you have !”

“Ah ! yes. Is she not a gem ?” and he caressingly put his hand on the smooth white head. “Do you think I have named her well ?”

“It is a curious name for a dog, is it not ?”

“Perhaps it is ; but I like it,” with

decision ; then, changing his position and looking at her for a moment, he said, "You are very good to come and teach Ida. Is it not tiresome?"

"Not at all," Violet said coldly.

"Well, I hope she will take pains to improve your kindness. Good morning."

He bowed courteously, though with formality ; then carelessly held out his hand to Ida, and said,

"Good-bye."

She approached him, and put up her cheek to be kissed.

"No, no," he said impatiently, and jumped out of the window.

Lionel Vane was well-formed, and his features finely cut ; but he was not handsome. There was no glow of youth about him. His countenance was far from in-

expressive ; his dark eyes and small lips far from passionless ; but the dry and staid air was unsuited to his boyish years, and it offended. On the other hand, the contrast between his manners and his years—the assumption which yet had nothing of affectation in it—gave him an interest he might otherwise have lacked. He irritated, annoyed, or amused, as the case might be, but he also certainly excited a degree of interest and attention.

Ida returned to Violet when he disappeared.

“I hope you liked him,” she said anxiously. “Is he not good?”

“Who is he? What is his name?”

“Lionel! Oh! you mean his name. Don’t you know? He is my cousin; he is Uncle Ashford’s son.”

"Oh! then he is Mr. Vane!" Violet said, light dawning upon her.

"Yes; but he is not at all like Uncle Ashford. I am afraid Uncle Ashford is not very good. I don't think Lionel likes him much."

"Not like his own father! My dear Ida, how you shock me!"

"But we can't like people if they are not good, can we?—I mean good people can't."

"By-the-bye, Ida," Violet said, unwilling to discuss the question, "what was that I heard your cousin say to you? Something that gave me great pain. I do like truth, I must own, better than anything, and should find it very hard to like a person who" she paused, for Ida's eyes filled with tears.

"Then you will never like me, for I did tell a story the other day, and I have done it before."

"But, my dear Ida, how could you? What made you? What did you say?"

"I pretended to Lionel that papa sent me to him, and he had not." Ida's eyes were cast down, and large tears fell on the floor. "And Lionel found it out, and he was *so* angry."

"He was right. A story is a horrid thing. What made you do it?"

"It was to be with *him*," she said piteously. "It does me so much good to see him. Nobody tells me of good things but him."

"Well, I am sure you never will do such a thing again," Violet cried, relaxing from her severity. "We must not do evil that

good may come ; don't you know where we are told this?"

Ida tearfully shook her head.

"It is in the Bible," Violet said, reverently.

"I don't read the Bible," was Ida's reply. "*Ma bonne* says it is too difficult for me."

"Oh ! but she is quite wrong," Violet said quickly ; "that is," correcting herself, "I think she is. But we will talk of this again. I must go now."

She rose and began to put on her things.

"Must you really go ? Yes, of course you must. You are very good to have staid so long. But you must wait a minute while I look for papa. He said he wished to speak to you before you went."

“Very well,” Violet said, not well pleased, but reluctant to refuse. “But I must go directly, will you say?”

CHAPTER VII.

“The evil that men do lives after them.”

Julius Cæsar.

IDA flew away. Violet addressed a few polite observations in French to *ma bonne*, and received some English answers, and then Ida returned with her father.

“I will let you out by a shorter way than you came,” he said, after a stiff inclination of his head, “if you will be good enough to come with me. Ida, wish Miss Osborne good-bye.”

She obeyed, and Violet followed Sir William. He fetched his hat, and ac-

accompanied her through a glass door into the garden.

"I have to thank you for coming," he then said, "and I hope it is a visit that will be often repeated."

"I will certainly come again, if Miss Hamilton likes it," Violet said.

"She likes it of course; but I was thinking of higher things than liking. My daughter has been much neglected. I have not perhaps thought on the subject as I ought."

"That is very plain," Violet thought, but she made no remark.

"I can conceive no better thing for her, Miss Osborne, than your society; such as I hear of you, such as I see you to be."

He spoke stiffly and formally; but Violet loved praise, and her heart beat

with its accustomed pleasure at the sound.

"You know very little of *me*," she said, however; "but I can fancy that any society that was not bad would be good for Miss Hamilton in the lonely life she leads."

"We may differ on that point; but be it so. I request from you the benefit of that society for her—at your leisure of course, and convenience."

"I will certainly come when I can."

He thanked her; then cleared his throat and hesitatingly said:

"There is a subject on which I wish to say a few words. I believe you have this day seen, been present, I mean, at an interview which may have surprised you."

"It certainly did," Violet said frankly.

“Miss Hamilton is young for the discussion of such subjects.”

“True; but it was inevitable. May I beg of you to bear that in mind, and to sanction the intercourse permitted and encouraged by me.”

“I am not going to be Miss Hamilton’s governess,” she said smiling. “Pray do not speak of my sanction, or I shall be afraid to visit her.”

“Yet I repeat the word,” he gravely replied. “You are a person, Miss Osborne, evidently accustomed to think and act for yourself. Supposing you to disapprove of the course I am pursuing, I can imagine that your disapprobation could not and would not be confined to your own mind.”

“I would try not to interfere with ar-

rangements with which I have no business," she answered, becoming interested in the conversation. "But perhaps you are right. I might show my feelings more than I intend. May I ask one question? Is Miss Hamilton bound? Supposing her, supposing Mr. Vane to dislike the engagement, at some future day, may they break it?"

She spoke eagerly.

"I am, I trust, no tyrant, Miss Osborne. If such a desire is expressed, it will then be time to consider the subject. At present we are all bound, whether we will or no. Will you allow me to make known to you a few circumstances connected with this scheme."

By a shorter path through the pleasure-grounds they had now almost reached

the gates into the high road, but Sir William paused in his walk and waited for a reply.

“I am in a hurry to get home,” Violet said, feeling some distaste to a lengthened walk; but at the same time, curiosity prevailing, she said, “still, if it would not take you long, I could wait for a few minutes.”

“I need not detain you long, and I may not have another opportunity. Be so good as to return a few steps.”

They turned backwards, and in as few words as it was possible to make himself understood, he related the following circumstances. His manner was grave and cold during the chief part of the conversation, but on one or two occasions a degree of feeling approaching to agitation might be

seen in his countenance and heard in his voice.

Lady Hamilton and Lady Ashford were sisters and co-heiresses ; but Lady Hamilton, the elder sister, had a double portion of fortune, and of other gifts likewise ; of mind, of body, and of manner. In early days Lord Ashford, a young man with extravagant tastes, and fortune small for his position in life, hearing the fame of her wealth, had sought her out. He sought her for her wealth, but, when he found her, loved her for herself, and for those charms of body and mind in which she excelled. Though of an unsteady and careless disposition, he had many good qualities, and considerable powers of pleasing, and after a time he prevailed upon her to consent to be his wife. But though she consented, her

heart was not with him. In the previous year she had met Sir William Hamilton, and to him her first love had been given. Pique at his apparent indifference had made her resolve to conquer her fancy, and with some hesitation to admit the attentions of a new suitor. It happened that after her engagement to Lord Ashford, and during the delay which the settlement of her large fortune produced, she met Sir William Hamilton again, and discovered that shyness and pride had been the secret of his apparent indifference, and that he loved her. This discovery made her marriage abhorrent to her; and though the day was approaching, she, being at this time of age, and her own mistress, broke it off with impetuous haste, and, to avoid per-

secution and lengthened observation, almost immediately afterwards, with like haste, married Sir William.

Lord Ashford had really loved her, loved her passionately; and though he did not act as if such was the case, his actions were in fact prompted by the bitterness of his heart. Not many months after her marriage, he married her sister. His necessities drove him to seek for money, and he fancied that he, by this act, was revenged on her for her faithlessness. And it was a revenge and a bitter punishment, for the misery of her sister nearly broke her heart. This sister was a timid, gentle, well-meaning, but weak girl. Her character and feelings were not strong, but they were impressible. When Lord Ashford went to her to be

comforted, she gave him her pity and her heart; and when he further asked for her hand, she could not withstand his entreaties. She was warned that he did not love her, but she was not given to think much of herself. She pitied him, married him, and he broke her heart.

His love for Lady Hamilton, and her superior qualities, would most probably have steadied him; but Lady Ashford had no power to work upon him, except gratitude, and that was shortlived. He neglected her; she withdrew into herself, pined in secret, and finally turned to Heaven for support and comfort. The strong religious principles which thenceforward guided her might have been brought in time to bear on him; but

unfortunately she learnt her views in a narrow school, and instead of exciting his admiration, he called her strait-laced, and held her in contempt. They separated more and more, and though occupants of the same house, she was sometimes for weeks together uncheered by his presence.

Lady Ashford had a son a year or two after her marriage, but Lady Hamilton was seven years without a child. After the birth of her daughter, she fell into weak health; and in the brooding state of mind—the effect of a weakened body and weakened nerves—which followed, she allowed a remorse that, however just in itself, was exaggerated in its degree, for her conduct to Lord Ashford, to fasten on her imagination. She saw that it had

exercised a fatal influence on his character, that it had caused the unhappiness of her sister, and with the warped and biassed views of an impulsive nature and awakened conscience, she became desirous of purchasing forgiveness, and becoming the healer of the blow she had inflicted. In one respect the plan she adopted was a safe one. Her sister's fortune, though large, had been insufficient for the exigencies of Lord Ashford's property and the gratification of his expensive tastes. She knew that money was a constant source of anxiety to him, and was therefore the point by which his ill-regulated mind could be touched. Her desire, therefore, was to restore that of which she had deprived him, through the union of her daughter with his son.

Having won Sir William's consent (for he was so fondly attached to her, that in her then state of health he could deny her nothing), she made known her wishes to both Lord Ashford and her sister, and met from both a ready acquiescence. From her sister because she loved her and trusted in her wisdom and experience ; from Lord Ashford because he saw the advantages of the plan, and because in an interview with Lady Hamilton, her words and manner soothed the bitterness still rankling in his heart, and rendered him also unable to resist her. A solemn engagement was entered into by all the parties concerned, the minutest particulars of the arrangements were legally drawn up and signed, and Lionel and Ida were brought up to consider themselves bound.

“And now,” Sir William said, when he had concluded his narration, “you will not blame me, I hope, for the circumstances in which I am involved.”

“I have no right either to praise or to blame,” Violet said, very decidedly; “and I am glad of it. It is not a case in which I should like to have any responsibility.”

“But you will not, I hope, so far refuse your sanction as to decline to visit my daughter. I thought it best to be open with you, but I should regret my openness if it withdrew your society from her.”

Half-gratified, half-provoked at his pertinacity, Violet replied that she saw no reason to make any change. She had said she would be glad to be of use to Miss

Hamilton, and she adhered to what she had said.

He gravely thanked her, observing,

“Should it happen, therefore, that Lionel Vane visits my daughter during such times and hours as your kindness may bestow upon her, you will not express any disapprobation?”

“Oh! certainly not!”

He thanked her again, and then added:

“This engagement is known to few. I did not wish to subject either party to scrutiny and observation. They are cousins, that suffices for the explanation of their intimacy. May I therefore beg of you, Miss Osborne, to consider what I have said as spoken in the strictest confidence, and spoken to you alone.”

“You may depend upon it,” Violet said,

quickly, for her discretion, her freedom from girlish gossip, was one of the points in her character of which she was slightly vain.

“Then I need detain you no longer. Thank you for hearing me.”

They were again near the gate, and bowing formally, he withdrew.

Violet hurried homewards, the tale she had heard occupying her mind. Though far more concisely put than in the above pages, Sir William had given force and vividness by choice of words, tone, and manner to his narrative, and it had excited her interest in no small degree. Engaged in ruminating on the circumstances, it was not till she came in sight of home that it struck her she had been heedless in her promise of secrecy. It flashed

across her that she was full young to be entrusted with such secrets apart from her parents. The thought flashed, was disagreeable, and was put by with the reflection that what is done can't be undone. She had been hasty, but unless she had an opportunity of renewing the conversation, it was too late to retract. Naturally open and communicative, she found herself several times in the course of the evening perplexed how to answer her father's questions, and internally fretted at the bondage imposed upon her; but before she went to bed a chance observation of Mr. Osborne's reassured her mind, and disposed her to think she had been wise.

He was speaking of a story he had been reading, in which a secret had been

kept for years in a remarkable manner.

“It would have been different if I had been there,” he said, in his good-humoured, easy way; “when a secret is entrusted to me, unless I am really put upon oath, I find myself alluding to it the next half hour. People have such a habit of saying, ‘don’t mention this,’ that for the life of me my puzzled head never knows what is to be published and what is not.”

“The best way, papa,” observed Violet sagely, “is not to publish anything.”

“But, my dear child, life would be unbearable under such circumstances. I would rather be a convict in chains.”

“Then you can’t expect to hear my secrets,” she gaily said.

“Yours, darling? Your own, do you

mean? I think I will promise to keep yours; but tell me no others, not even Mr. Pope's, if he entrusts them to you. I shall be sure to allude to them at an improper moment."

"I don't believe you," she said, kissing him, and wishing him good night; "but I shall take warning by what you say;" and her conscience went quietly to sleep.

CHAPTER VIII.

“There is instant delight in the first conceptions of benevolence; there is sustained delight in its continued exercise; there is consummated delight in the happy, smiling, prosperous result of it.”

CHALMERS.

THE following day was the morning for Violet's class. She went to the church and gave her instructions. On turning from the organ to take up her bonnet which lay on the seat, she observed in one of the open seats in the church below a man sitting, and after a second glance, though his back was turned and

his head bent, fancied it was Mr. Vane.

She felt angry for a moment at his daring to come without her leave; but the next instant, as she dismissed the children, and said to Amy White, "I will walk home with you," forgot what she had observed.

Among her other avocations, the welfare of Amy was not forgotten. She perceived that though endowed with a considerable share of patience and perseverance, Amy had no high thoughts upon her destiny. She had engaged to perform certain duties, and she rigidly performed them; but that the office of instructress had dignity; that education might be the means of effecting the highest good; that a task ennobling and inspiring, if she

could view it as such, was in her hands, were ideas that did not present themselves. To elevate, therefore, and improve her, to enlarge her mind on the subject of education, and try by occasional companionship to preserve that degree of refinement which her present position imperiled in a common-place mind, was one of Violet's self-imposed tasks. Had conscience suggested that the hope of hearing Leicester's name gave a charm it might not otherwise have possessed to this duty, she might perhaps have blushed and smiled and owned it; but she was at this time too busy for self-contemplation, and conscience gave no such hint. She was not aware on this day, as she turned from and forgot the intruder, what sweet hope it was which made her walk with

Amy, an object of anticipation and attraction.

The secret hope was not disappointed. As they set forth together, taking an out-of-the-way route by a cottage at which Violet wished to call, Amy said :

“I must tell you a piece of good news, Miss Osborne. I know you will be glad. I had a letter from Mr. Hartley this morning, and he encloses me quite a little fortune. It is a curious story. A man, a gentleman, called upon him to ask where we were to be found. He said my poor father had once paid a debt for him when he was in distress in India, and that he had never been able to repay it till now.”

“My dear Amy, I am so glad,” Violet cordially said. “What a good, honest

man! And it will be of real use to you now. How much is it?"

"Ah!" Amy replied with a blush, "I have said too much to you. I forgot that you would not think of it as I do. It is only ten pounds."

"Indeed, Amy, you are wrong," Violet said with honesty. "Whatever I may once have felt, I know the worth of ten pounds now. I too should look on it as a little fortune. Does Mr. Hartley say more?"

"Not much. He says he met Mr. Leicester, and told him the story, and that he was glad; but he writes in a hurry, and does not say much."

"May I see the letter?"

"I left it with my mother. I only got it half an hour before I came out.

Have you time to step in and see her? She would be pleased. If I am not troublesome in asking it."

"I have plenty of time. I should like to see the letter. Wait a moment while I look in here, and I will come with you."

She had brought a large checked apron for a slovenly woman, and having decked her in it, said she wished she had a looking-glass to show her how improved her appearance was.

The woman laughed, smoothed the apron, and evidently admired herself; but said it was difficult to be clean with ten children to run after; and difficult to spend on herself when they were in want. And then followed a narrative of all the small articles of which the ten small chil-

dren were at that moment in urgent need.

Violet looked dismayed for a moment, then nodded kindly, and said she would see what could be done, and retreated.

“A fortnight’s hard work before me,” she said, laughing to Amy. “I must try and make up some at least of those deficiencies.”

“Oh! Miss Osborne, was there ever anyone like you. I believe never. All the people say so.”

“But I like it, Amy. I hate idleness. I like work—hard work; if I had no other, I should like to work in the fields. I wish you liked work better.”

Amy sighed and shook her head.

It was a good opportunity for one of Violet’s kindly lectures, and she gave it;

but it was less forcible than usual, for her fancy was running in another direction. She was wording to herself that paragraph of Mr. Hartley's letter which regarded Leicester, and when they came to the school she said:

"But you will be tired of my exhortations."

"No, indeed, Miss Osborne. I only wish I *could* feel as you do."

"You will in time," Violet said quickly, and hurried into the kitchen, where Mrs. White sat by the fire.

She offered her sincere and cheerful congratulations, and forgetting Mrs. White's propensities, was abashed at the indifferent answer:

"No such great matter to make such a fuss about."

“No, not great ; but still a help, Mrs. White. I am sure I should feel it so.”

“Of course, when people are poor every little is a help. But Amy makes such a fuss, and Mr. Leicester calls it good news, and we shall be set down as rolling in riches, when I am sure we hardly make out bread to eat.”

“May I see the letter?” Violet asked, wisely declining to continue the argument.

“Yes, the letter is simple enough. Mr. Hartly might have told us a little more about it, I think. People forget what it is to live in the country and hear nothing.”

The letter was now in Violet's eager hands, and though certainly simple enough,

she contrived to extract pleasure from it. After telling his tale in as few words as possible, apologizing for extreme haste, Mr. Hartley added :

“ I met your good friend Mr. Leicester, and told him my story. He begged me to give his kind regards to your mother, and to say he was rejoiced at the good news.”

The same Leicester—sending his discreet regards to the mother. Smiles played round Violet’s lips as she read, and three times the sentence was perused before she was satisfied.

“ Well, then, good-bye, Mrs. White,” she then cried cheerfully. “ I hope this fine weather agrees with your rheumatism.”

“ I thought you were come in for a

little chat, but it seems you only came to read my letter."

A blush was on Violet's cheek as she replied :

"I beg your pardon. I did not mean to be uncivil. I will very soon come and have a little chat with you, but I have not time to stay to-day."

"Oh ! no offence ; I meant no offence ; but some people think those who are poor have nothing to do but to work. I like a little chat as well as you do."

"I will soon come back," her young visitor replied kindly, and nodding with her gay smile to Amy, who stood sighing at her mother's rudeness, she hastened into the fresh air.

"Poor thing ! what a misfortune to

have such a bad temper!" Violet was soliloquizing when she heard her name pronounced from behind. She turned round and saw Lionel Vane.

He took off his hat, and approaching, said:

"I beg your pardon, Miss Osborne; I am lucky to meet you. I went to church for the purpose, but when I came out you had disappeared."

"I turned down a lane. But what can you want with me?" Violet said, addressing him like the boy she considered him to be.

"May I walk with you?" and he placed himself at her side.

"Certainly. I am going home. But what can you want?"

"To speak to you on a matter that

concerns myself. "Miss Hamilton," he began abruptly, "confided to you, I find, the circumstances in which we stand."

"Yes," Violet said hesitatingly; "but I should think the less that is said about it the better."

"You are right. I was about to ask you if you approved of the plans in question, but I guess from your tone that you do not."

"I will have no guesses," Violet said playfully; "nor will I be questioned about my opinions. I have nothing to do with the subject."

"I beg your pardon. I will question no more. But though you withhold your approbation, I mean your opinions, there is something you can do for me. Will you hear me for a moment?"

"I cannot think why I am to be dragged into this business," she said impatiently, provoked partly by the stateliness of his tone, and still more at being, as she said, dragged into an affair the plot of which she disapproved.

"If you will kindly let me speak, I think you will see why. Do listen to me!" he added, dropping for an instant his formal manner, and speaking with earnestness.

"Well, I will listen," she more graciously replied.

"You may well imagine," he resumed in his old manner, "that my future life causes me many anxious thoughts. Bound as I am, it is hardly safe for me to have opinions and wishes, and yet I have them."

In her heart Violet acknowledged his case was hard.

“What are your wishes?” she asked, with kindness.

“My wish of course is to have a wife who suits my tone of mind, and would act and think and feel as I do. I am not a common person. I don’t mean to claim any high mental gifts, but I repeat it, *morally*, I am not a common person. I have a scorn of evil, which makes it hateful to me.”

Up to the last sentence he spoke in a grave, measured tone, but at those words his eyes flashed, and there was a heart of some kind in what he said.

Some are quick and some are slow. Violet was quick, and remembering what she

had heard, she discovered an allusion to his father in the warmth of his tone. The suspicion kept her silent, and she made no remark on what he said.

He paused for a moment in expectation of an observation; receiving none, he went on :

“Such being my feeling, you may guess that Ida Hamilton’s character causes me great uneasiness.”

“She seems a dear, affectionate little thing,” Violet said warmly.

“I don’t deny it; but you must be aware, Miss Osborne, that affectionate natures are not always those who pass safest through the world. Unless principle, good firm principle, moral and religious, can be given to Ida, her very

goodness and warmth of feeling may lead her into errors; and my future life, *our* future life, may be fraught with misery."

Though he spoke in a tone singular and irritating in so young a man, there was no doubt of his earnestness, nor yet of the truth of what he said.

"I almost wonder," Violet said, after a pause of thought, "that feeling as you do, you do not at once assert the freedom which of course must be yours, and break this engagement."

"Do not put such thoughts into my head. My mother wishes for it, and that is enough."

So softened, so altered was his voice and countenance, that Violet was taken by

surprise ; she was compelled to feel an interest in him.

“ But why do you come to me ? What can I do for you ? ” she asked.

“ Much. You can take Ida and make her such as I wish her, such as she ought to be. You have already influence ; exert it for the sake of the happiness of two lives.”

“ And why have you fixed upon me for this task ? And how,” she added playfully, “ have you formed so high an idea of my powers and virtues ? ”

“ There is such a thing, Miss Osborne, as physiognomy.”

“ Yes ; but I should not suppose your experience in physiognomies was very great.”

“More perhaps than you think,” he calmly said. “But I own I have other grounds for my opinion. I hear of you, and were it only the conversation you held yesterday with Ida on the subject of truth, it were enough to assure me that the friend I wished for her is found. She told me what had passed, and I think she will not readily deceive again.”

The sweet incense of praise, the sweet flattery of hearing her words had been words in season! It stole through Violet's heart and brain, and cheered and elated her.

“Well,” she replied, “if all you ask of me is to give such simple notions of right and wrong as that, I think I can promise it shall be done; for in fact I

could not associate with her without doing it. But here we are at home, will you come in?"

"Not to-day, thank you. I will call before I go. Thank you for your promise, it is all I ask or wish. Good morning."

He took off his hat with formal politeness, but Violet said, "Good-bye," and frankly held out her hand.

Her father was at the open window of the drawing-room, and when she entered, said :

"Why, darling, what is this? What has Mr. Vane got to say to you?"

"Do you know him, papa? I never saw him till yesterday."

"Only by sight. What has he to say for himself?"

“He was impertinent enough to come to the church while I was giving my lesson,” Violet said; “and he asked if he might walk home with me.”

“But that is not quite the thing for young ladies and gentlemen, is it, darling?”

“Young ladies and gentlemen!” Violet said scornfully; “a priggish school-boy!”

Her father laughed.

“Well, he does not look very advanced in years, certainly,” and having so remarked he said no more.

Violet, annoyed at the mystery in which against her will she was involved, slipped away to avoid further questioning; but as she stood in her room and looked out on the world just budding into

spring, the annoyance passed from her mind, and happy thoughts took possession.

“What mattered the loss of fortune! How little had been taken from her! It had not been her wealth that gave happiness, for still in her poverty all seemed to come to her for help, and hang upon her for sympathy and encouragement.”

There came a faint whisper of some words she had heard, and at the time had not heeded :

“I shall hear of you, I know I shall, the help, the friend, the comforter of many,” and a tear soft and glad fell on her cheek. Leicester *would* hear of all she was doing and would do, and would know that he had not wasted his love

and care on a heart that could not feel and profit; he would own that, in spite of her faults, she was worthy of his affection. Sweet and bright lay the present around her, sweet and bright shone a future before her, and she went down to rejoin her parents with a face shining like the spring sun in the fresh grass.

CHAPTER IX.

“My heart is sair for somebody.”

Scotch Song.

BUT a blow was awaiting Violet, a blow which had never so much as cast its shadow on the mirror of her fancy.

When Leicester returned from the business in Yorkshire, on which he had been engaged, he, acting according to the expression in the letter to Marian, put away the memory of the past, and resumed his old life with his sisters. He summoned a considerable degree of

cheerfulness, dined at home frequently, and acted as *chaperon* whenever his services were required. Some of his sisters were deceived by the tranquillity of his manner. Talking over the events of the past year, about two months after the separation of their brother and Violet, Jessie, in the course of conversation, observed :

“I never was more surprised than I am at the way John bears it. I thought he would have been miserable. I thought his heart would have been broken.”

“John is too sensible to break his heart for what is worthless,” Margaret said quickly, for she had not forgiven Violet.

“Ah ! but, Margaret, then it was not love—not real love,” and Jessie became very sentimental. “People don’t think of

that when they are truly in love. And besides, Miss Osborne was very pretty, and it is not her fault that she lost her money."

"You goose!" replied her sister, shortly, but she said no more.

"For once I must own I agree with Jessie," observed Marian. "I am surprised, very much surprised, at the way in which John has borne it. I certainly thought he would have taken it more to heart."

"He has taken it to heart quite enough," said Henrietta. "He has not been the same man since it happened, and I begin to think he never will."

All her sisters looked at her, and Jessie said :

“ Oh ! Henrietta, what ! what do you see ? ”

“ I see that he is a great deal too quiet and patient. If I could once see him put out as he *sometimes* used to be ; if I could see him annoyed at your folly, Jessie, or teased at Margaret’s attentions, I should have some hope ; but he has no spirit left in him. His heart may not be broken, but it has somehow or other been bruised, or wounded, or crushed, or whatever the proper and not the sentimental word would be. He never *has* been like himself since the very first night he saw her.”

“ I said that ! ” cried Jessie triumphantly ; “ I said then it was love at first sight, and you would not believe me ; but I knew I was right.”

“Is it true, do you think, Rachel?” Margaret said, stealing to Rachel’s room shortly afterwards. “Do you think Henrietta is right about John?”

Rachel nodded.

“I hoped he was getting over it. I hoped his spirit was roused, as mine would have been.”

Rachel shook her head.

“Oh! that Miss Osborne!” and Margaret clenched her fist. “What has she not to answer for?”

“The worst is over now, Margaret,” Rachel said. “Do not let us talk of it. I cannot bear to speak even to you of John’s feelings; they seem to me too sacred for discussion. I only see that, as Henrietta said, his heart is wounded and sore, and that as yet little has been done

towards healing it. But the worst is past."

"You think so really?"

"I do indeed. He is busier than he has ever yet been; and business is everything for a man, and *everything* for him. I don't at all despair of seeing cheerfulness, real cheerfulness, return."

About a week after this conversation, Leicester one night dined at home with his sisters, and remained at home during the evening. He was grave, and abstracted, and, unlike his usual practice, made no efforts to rouse himself. On more than one occasion, when eagerly appealed to as umpire in their feminine disputes, he, instead of half-playfully, half-satirically, as was his custom, appeasing the strife, smiled faintly, begged their pardon, and owned that his mind had

wandered. The sisters looked at each other, but asked no question.

After dinner he pulled a pamphlet from his pocket and read for an hour or two, without any apology, or any attempt to make himself agreeable. The shadow of his gravity fell on all, and each sister worked, or read, or wrote in silence. But again without remark on his part; without the usual considerate speech, that, though he was busy, he could assure them their conversation was no interruption to his studies.

An hour or two had passed without other sound than the clicking of Henrietta's pen, the fall of Margaret's scissors, and two yawns from Jessie, when Leicester suddenly looked at the clock, saw it was past half-past ten, restored the pamphlet to

his pocket, rose and stood with his back to the fire.

All looked up at him; there was a general feeling that something was coming, and when, in a hesitating voice, he said, "I have something to say to you all," each sister felt that they had been prepared for some momentous event. All remained silent, but every eye rested upon him inquiringly.

"An offer has been made to me to-day, the offer of an appointment, a judgeship. I have two days allowed me to think it over;"—he paused; then slowly added, "it is in India."

There was a faint scream from Marian, Henrietta, and Jessie. Margaret and Rachel sat with open eyes and lips apart, but made no sound.

"I startle you," he gently said, looking round; and then again there was a silence.

It was broken by Marian. She was ashamed of her scream, and, anxious to redeem her character, now asked quietly, "Is it a good thing?"

"Yes, very good, far beyond my expectations or my deserts."

"That I deny," Henrietta observed, also anxious to efface the memory of her scream. "How came it to be offered?"

"I do not know. Some kind friend must have suggested my name."

There was another silence, and then Margaret spoke. "You wish to accept it, John?"

A faint flush tinted his cheek. All saw it as he stood full in the lamp-light.

"If it concerned only myself," he replied steadily, "I certainly should wish to take it, but I am in your hands. What concerns me, concerns you also."

"I know why you wish to go," said Jessie in a tearful voice; "it is all Miss Osborne's fault."

The faint flush deepened to a purple glow, and an expression as if a wound fretted and sore had been rudely touched, contracted his countenance for a moment; but when he spoke it was gently.

"I believe you are right, Jessie. I have not been happy of late, and I would forget if I could. Am I selfish in this?" Though gently spoken, it was with such evident effect, that there was a hasty answer "No—no," from all, to relieve him.

“But you must understand,” he continued quickly, “that I leave it in your hands to decide. Will you talk it over to-night and to-morrow; and to-morrow night tell me what answer I shall give.”

“We cannot till we know more,” said Marian. “I do not understand. Are we to go with you, or to be left behind?”

“I am not so selfish as to propose to drag you from your home,” he replied hastily; “I trust there is no need. With this addition to our income, you and I can equally live in comfort; and after a few years I shall hope to return to you.”

“You will not return to me, John!” cried Margaret, rising from her seat, and

approaching him. "If you go, I go with you!"

He smiled, and stroked her head as she stood beside him.

"Thanks, dear Margaret; but I will have no hasty speeches. Think it well over, and decide as is best for your happiness. Good night."

After saying good night, he moved so rapidly, that he had left the room before another word was said.

When the door closed there was another silence. Each sister looked oppressed with thought. At last Margaret spoke again:

"Why did you not all speak?" she inquired. "Do you mean to let him go alone?"

"I did not think it needed words," Rachel replied in a husky voice. "John

knows that he is all the world to me."

And it was true. Rachel had given no look, nor signed a sign, but John did know that her mind was made up, and that she was, even at that moment, ready to accompany him.

"I did not speak, because I was not ready to speak," said Henrietta. "You must own, Margaret, it is a startling proposal. Half an hour ago we thought we were all happy and comfortable for life in England, and here is a plan for removing us from friends, and acquaintances, and habits, and all we care for."

"Henrietta is right," observed Marian. "It requires thought."

"I never can leave friends and ac-

quaintance, and all I care for," cried Jessie tearfully. "I must say I think it is unkind of John."

"Unkind!" cried Margare't, as if she would have murdered her.

"I don't mean unkind, but only very thoughtless, and very unlike John. It is all Miss Osborne, I know, and I hate her!"

"If you ever again mention Miss Osborne to John," observed Henrietta, "I shall turn you out of my room, and then what shall you do?"

"I think you are all very unkind to me," cried poor Jessie; "you have never liked me since the day I said John was in love with Miss Osborne; but I was right all the while."

The sisters were too much occupied

with other and weighty thoughts to attend to Jessie and her grievances, and Henrietta and Marian, with occasional words from the others, proceeded to discuss the *pros* and *cons* of the question. No decision was then made, but in the course of the night each came in her secret cogitations to the same issue: they would all go with John. When Marian and Henrietta had thus resolved, Jessie gave in her adhesion at once.

“It will be very disagreeable and a dreadful nuisance to leave all we care for,” she said; “but I suppose we shall come back some day, and at any rate India will be quite a new place to see.”

Leicester, wishing his sisters to make an unbiassed decision, left the house before breakfast the following morning.

When he returned to dinner, the announcement was made.

Whether in his secret heart the universal acceptance was welcome was a question which even his secret thoughts were not allowed to debate. That which was offered with affectionate devotion, with affectionate gratitude, was accepted; and the point was debated no more. He gave his answer on the following day, and the change of prospects became known to all the friends of the family; as some impatience on the subject was also expressed, preparations for an early departure were immediately begun.

CHAPTER X.

“I am sad

At thought of raptures now for ever flown.”

The Prelude.

VIOLET carried on for ten days her new avocations with complete success and considerable absorption of mind. Visits to Ida were frequently paid; and the more she saw of the simple and warm-hearted child, the more she won upon her affections. Her natural good gifts were as plain as the lamentable deficiencies of her education; and, not to please Lionel

Vane, but because she could not, as she had said, associate with her without an endeavour to improve her, Violet devoted herself to her new task. What Lionel had suggested, however, was borne in mind; it was principle that Ida wanted, and it was principle, religious and moral, which, little by little, Violet strove to give. It was a new task, and, in trying to carry it out, she felt her deficiencies; but her spirit rose with the sense of responsibility. She felt animated by the burden laid upon her, and cheered by the hope of the good set before her.

At the end of these ten days the blow fell. Mrs. Osborne received one morning at breakfast a letter from Albert. She looked at a few lines, then hurriedly glanced at her husband and Violet. But

Mr. Osborne was reading the newspaper, and Violet was smiling over a circular from an upholsterer in the neighbouring town requesting her patronage.

She read a few lines more, then laid the letter by her side, and endeavoured to look unconcerned.

"What does Albert say to-day?" inquired Violet.

"I have not finished his letter," Mrs. Osborne replied. She was not much of a diplomatist, and, accustomed to share all her thoughts with her daughter, was perplexed how to act in this emergency.

"Is there any secret, mamma?" Violet said, 'gaily; "you look guilty—don't she, papa?"

"He does ask my opinion," Mrs.

Osborne said, the pressure of necessity helping her to act; "you shall read the letter, dear, by-and-bye."

"I do believe Albert is going to be married. But who can be worthy of his fastidious taste?"

Mrs. Osborne smiled faintly, but made no answer; and Violet, though curious, confident that every matter was sooner or later imparted to her, asked no more. She returned to her circular, with its list of desirable ladies' furniture; and with no contemptuous or repining smile, looked round their tiny rooms, and asked where the good man expected her to stow away his treasures.

Her father answered her as gaily, and Mrs. Osborne's abstraction was noticed only with a laugh.

After breakfast Violet retired, as was her custom, for an hour or two of real study. She was extremely anxious to improve in wisdom and knowledge, and under her present excitement found it easy to attend to dry though valuable authors, and to give herself to her work with undivided attention. She was reading zealously in her room, when her door opened, and Mrs. Osborne entered.

Violet looked up. The grave face startled her.

“What is the matter, mamma! Is there anything the matter?” she asked eagerly.

“I hope not, dearest; but there is something in Albert’s letter which may I do not well know I think, dear, you

shall take and read it, and I will come back again."

Violet guessed now to what Albert's secret related. Her heart beat, then ceased beating, as she silently gazed at her mother.

"Was Leicester ill? Was Leicester false?" These were the questions that passed rapidly through her brain, but were not spoken.

"There, dear," and Mrs. Osborne drew the letter from her apron pocket. "Take it and read it comfortably, and I will come back by-and-bye."

She put it into her daughter's passive hand, kissed her, and left the room with a sigh.

This was Albert's letter:—

“ MY DEAR AUNT,

“ I heard yesterday a piece of news which I am perplexed how to break to Violet. Though she chose to make an end with Leicester, young women are perverse people, and she may regret the step he is about to take. A judgeship in India has been offered to him, and he has accepted it. There is no doubt, I have none at least, that it is Violet who has driven him to this; but at the same time it is a very good thing, and except for the loss of his company, *I* do not regret it. He was certainly getting more known, and his prospects are improving, but his diffidence, poor fellow, is sadly against him, and he will do better when he has regular duties, than when they are more or less dependent

on himself. This is what I really think, and this is what must comfort Violet, if she is disposed to blame herself and take it to heart.

“Leicester told me yesterday of his acceptance, and in the evening I called in Clarges Street and saw all the sisters. Margaret Leicester told me that after the first shock they all had made up their minds to the change, and were resolved to go with him. I am glad of this, though I own it makes my prospects rather flat. I have not many friends that I care about, and one by one they leave me alone in London. Clarges Street is to be let for six years, after which time Leicester can give up the appointment if he pleases.

“This is all I know. They are to

be off in a month ; and after they are gone, I must make a holiday and run down and see you. My love to my uncle and Violet. I shall be glad to hear from you soon.

“Your affectionate nephew,

“ALBERT ELLIS.”

Violet laid down the letter and gazed from the window. Was it the same sunny world she had looked out upon half an hour before ? Many similes might be used to describe the sudden darkness which clouded over the brightness of her mind, the sudden winter which nipped the spring of her content ; but they are not needed. It was for the time being the end of all things. Hopes, good desires, aims of usefulness, and power

of enjoyment—all vanished, all were shattered by the bolt which fell. Self was revealed, the secret heart laid bare. She knew how Leicester's image had been set up in that inner shrine; how his approbation had been the spur to every action; how hope, the hope of life with him, had taken the sting from every trial and made her future sweet. She felt it now, and after a time of passive, stagnant wretchedness, she dropped her face in her hands, shuddered, and wept bitterly.

Then followed strange, mad thoughts. She would write to him, go to him, arrest him in his course. She, Violet, so proud and haughty, felt she could kneel to him, plead with him to give up this fatal resolution. She had wounded, she would humble herself now, and heal the wound

she had made. It was the same Violet, undisciplined still, who fell under this blow, as she had fallen before the one which first shattered her life's pleasures.

When Mrs. Osborne came to her door she bolted it and refused admittance. With the thought of others came new feelings. That pride, or more properly that self-respect which is inseparable from a real passion, which was not wanting even in Juliet's frank and passionate love, rose up to torture her. Leicester was forgetting or forsaking her. He was shaking her from his memory, as one who had been a torment to his peace. She felt humbled, and shrank from the pity she needed.

Sad and disappointed, yet too wise to force an intrusion on the first bitter

hours of repentance and regret, Mrs. Osborne at length retreated and left Violet to herself.

But when two or three hours passed, and her daughter gave no signs of relenting, she returned to the closed door.

“Violet, darling, let me in,” she softly cried. “You are unkind, dearest, to your mother.” And Violet was conquered, and opened the door.

She sat down again in the window, and her mother laid her hand on her shoulder, and softly stroked her hair.

“My poor darling!” she tenderly said, and kissed her.

The pity was too much for Violet’s pride.

“But why, mamma,” she cried with flashing eyes, “why am I to care for what Mr. Leicester does?”

“Because you loved him, dear, and it would not be like you so soon to forget.”

“*He* forgets,” she said bitterly, and passionate rebellious tears sprang into her eyes.

“Never, dearest! I do not think he ever will.”

Violet was arrested, and looked up into her mother’s face. A gleam of hope, sweet and bright, flitted around her.

“Oh! mamma, how do you mean?”

“I only say what I think, dear. I know nothing. I only *feel* that Mr. Leicester cast all his happiness upon you, and he is not a man who could change if he would.”

“But India, mamma,” and despair gathered again over her features.

“Yes, dear, I know. I think he is

wretched, and wishes for change to comfort him and cheer him. It is very natural, darling. It shows all things except forgetfulness. Many things may happen to him and to you, before six years are over. I don't want to set your mind on him, nor his on you; it would be unwise—but I cannot think that he will forget.”

There is a peculiar power in gentle, unexcited words; an especial power when accompanied with tenderness. Very vague and intangible was the hope inspired by Mrs. Osborne's speech, but it soothed Violet—soothed her wounded heart and pride, stilled her agitation, and, merely kissing her mother, she rose up, washed the traces of tears from her cheeks, and said: “I suppose it is luncheon-time. I

will come down, mamma. I will not worry you and papa if I can help it."

"My darling!" said the fond mother, and they went down together.

And Violet exerted herself to be herself, smiled when her father entered the room, smiled again when he related an anecdote he had heard about Mr. Pope, and thus lulled to rest the fears for her happiness which had been for a few hours troubling the peace of her home.

But when she saw this object accomplished, she gave a respite to her painful efforts; and when Mr. Osborne, in his desire to amuse, proposed a walk for the afternoon, she declined. She had a cottage to visit, and a child's frock to finish before she went; and, thanking him, she escaped to solitude.

Having made her excuse, she, with the truth which was a feature of her character, bound herself to her task, finished the frock, and late in the afternoon strolled out alone on her visit of charity. Then only she felt in its fulness the change that had come over her. No beauty in the May evening could dispel the cloud that hung on nature, no rapture of the child in her new garment, no gratitude in the poor woman for this and other help afforded, could create one joyous feeling in her heart. A languor, a stupor, and deadness pervaded all things in earth and in heaven; and Violet shuddered in spirit as she contemplated the life before her.

Nor was this mood of mind confined to that day. As time passed on, as the

excitement of the first shock of the news died away, a deader depression settled on her spirits. Conscientiously, everything she had undertaken to do was done; but there was as great a difference in the temper of mind in which her tasks were now performed, as there may be in the feelings of a jockey in a race, compared with those of a prisoner treading the treadmill.

She heard very little, nothing that excited or pleased her. Albert wrote as usual, and generally mentioned the Leicesters, but nothing came that could act as medicine to her sick heart. One day he said they had been very lucky, and had found a tenant for the house in Clarges Street, an old couple, without children, who took it off their hands for five years. Another

day he said he had been to dine with the Leicesters, and had found the house in a sad state of confusion, packing having begun. At last he said they were to be off in a fortnight at latest. But never a word from Leicester, no message from any of the family to herself; neither was there ever a remark on Albert's part which implied that she was thought of with pity or with blame; no observation by which she could feel that her share in this event was remembered. The soreness of spirit, the sense of desolation increased; the dreariness of life became more oppressive. Confined to that country village, when she would have sacrificed years for one hour in London, there were moments when the power of endurance seemed failing. But all this took place in the silence of her heart.

She lived as usual, and said nothing—thought at least she lived as usual, was not aware that light had left her eye, and smiles ebbed from her lips, that her mother wept for her in the darkness of night, and that her poor neighbours shook their heads, and in private conclave speculated on the cause of the change that had come over her.

At last Albert wrote to say that the day of departure was fixed; that he should go and see the Leicesters on board, and be at Holywell as soon after they had sailed as was possible.

This was something to look to. Violet was roused from her weary, stagnant state. She was restless, anxious, miserable; but she *felt* again, and woke with thankful-

ness out of the cloud in which she had been shrouded.

Albert arrived unexpectedly the very day after the departure. He walked into the Cottage drawing-room at five o'clock, where Violet and her mother were sitting. There was a cry of joy from both, and an apology from him, that as he *could* come straight, he thought it better to come at once, and not to wait for a letter of announcement.

"Much better," Violet said, and then they sat in silence, which was broken only by formal questions regarding his journey, and what he would have to eat.

Violet was impatient by nature, and she was restless to be comforted by some certain word. She soon rose up and invited him to walk with her, and on his acqui-

escence, left the room, and put her bonnet on.

When she was gone restraint vanished. Albert drew nearer to his aunt, and with a nod to the door, said :

“How does she bear it? Does she take it to heart?”

“I fear she does,” Mrs. Osborne replied; “she says little, but is she not changed? She is as dull and quiet almost as I am.”

“Women are curious creatures,” Albert remarked drily; “why did she use him as she did? She nearly broke his heart, I can tell her.”

“I think, dear Albert, you and we also have been to blame in speaking always and thinking of Violet as a *woman*. She is but a young girl, scarcely twenty,

and she acts with the impulses of early youth. She is wise in many things, but nothing but years and principle and experience teach us how to govern the passions of the heart. Poor Violet is not the first young girl who, in a moment of excitement and misery, has done what she has regretted for life. Perhaps," Mrs. Osborne added, with a sigh, "we ought not to regret that she suffers a little for her rashness; I only pray it may end in her happiness."

"What happiness do you mean?"

"Whatever is for her happiness," Mrs. Osborne replied, "but, if it please God, happiness at some time with Mr. Leicester."

"My dear aunt!" Albert said, drawing nearer, "I had no idea you cared so

much about Leicester—valued him so highly, I mean. I wish he had known it, poor fellow!”

“Perhaps I did not always know it myself; but we learn many things, dear Albert, from the trials of life; and in the storm that has swept away our earthly goods, I have learnt some things I needed to learn. We were too ambitious for Violet. I was, I know; I wished her to be grand and great. She reproached me in her first misery for having taught her to overvalue the goods that perish. I shall never forget her words. They have sunk deep, and now, I hope, I wish better things. Mr. Leicester is a good man, and to him I should confide her with perfect confidence. It may yet come to pass, please God!”

The impassive face had kindled as she spoke with the light of the mind within; but it died away as she ceased, and after a moment Albert said—

“I am very glad to know your opinion on the subject, as it may help me, if Violet questions me. But, Aunt Elizabeth, six years is a long time, and India is very far away.”

“If it is so, then they are not attached as I think they are, nor are they necessary to each other’s happiness. Let us leave the future alone. I would neither encourage nor discourage Violet in thinking of it if she pleases. She is free. She can be left to herself. I have no anxiety about that, Albert. If she can but cheer up and be as happy here as she was two months ago, I shall have

no anxiety about her. But Mr. Leicester, Albert; tell me”

Before Albert could hear the question or answer it, Violet returned, and invited him to accompany her. He had been struck by her altered manner in the first moment of his reception, but he was more struck by it now. The gravity of her face had a kind of settled cast, as if such was now its predominant expression.

They strolled out into the road, but, when alone with her, Albert's restraint returned. He was afraid of entering on the subject which he knew must come, and he took refuge for the moment in admiration.

“Really, Violet, I must compliment you on your taste. The Cottage, for such a

small thing, is perfect; and as to the country," and his eye devoured the smiling valley, "you could scarcely match such a view as this in the whole world."

"Yes, it is beautiful," she replied, listlessly. "It struck me many years ago, and I remembered it when the time came to choose."

"I know; it showed great taste and judgment on your part. Many people see things, but few see them with useful observation."

When he had delivered himself of this moral sentiment, he came to a stand, and then Violet began—

"Are the Leicesters—is Mr. Leicester gone, Albert?"

"Yes," he said, relieved by her openness. "I saw them on board. All very

comfortable, and with some very nice companions for the voyage, as far as one could tell, at least, by looks and a few words."

"Were they sorry to go?" She did not dare to say, "Was he sorry?"

"Sorry, of course; but nobody cried except that poor silly girl they call Jessie, and why she cried I don't know. Of course it is a break up, but they think so much of *him*, that to do him a pleasure they would go through worse things."

"And it is a pleasure to him to go?" Violet asked in a low voice.

"I don't say that. But though not a pleasure it is a relief, and it is a pleasure to them to forward his wishes, whatever they may be."

"I am very sorry for *you*, Albert," Violet said gently. "What shall you do to replace such a friend?"

"Nothing," he said shortly. "What *could* I do? No one knows or can know what a friend he has been to me."

"I think I do."

"No, you don't. No one can. It is between him and me. But I shall not wish to replace him. Was it not an old Duke of Ormond who said he would rather have his dead son than any living son in Christendom, and so I say of Leicester, absent. He is better to me even in absence than any new friend could be. I know what he would approve and disapprove, and I shall try and follow his example and wishes till he comes back again. Not," he continued, in a more

careless manner, "that I am going to retire from the world or make myself ridiculous. I shall take acquaintances as they come, and hope to find some to make the time pass easily. I expect no more."

Violet made no answer. She was meditating on his words—making them her own. Was not her absent lover more to her than any new friend could be? Could not *she* make herself what he would approve, and follow his wishes till his return. If only she could have some assurance of his constancy, to soothe her aching heart.

"Why did he go, Albert?" she asked at last abruptly.

"You know, Violet. You have no need to ask me."

"No, I don't," she said tremulously.

“He went because you made his life miserable. I mean disappointment so preyed upon him, that he could not shake it off without change of scene. I only say what I suppose ; he never told me this was the cause. The youngest sister, Margaret, did, but he never did.”

“And does he wish to shake it off?” she asked with a heart that beat almost to bursting.

“Of course he does.”

Albert looked round, he scarcely knew why. Her cheek was pale, and there was a tear in her eye. It was so new and so strange a thing to see Violet in such a mood that he scarcely understood it. Very discreetly he looked, as if he had seen nothing, and only continued less quickly :

“When I say of course, I only mean that no man likes to suffer. They will try and put away misery if they can. At least unless they are fools they will. I think Leicester wishes to put away his misery; but I don’t at all know that he wishes to forget. He is not the sort of man to forget easily, and when in another country, and in the midst of new occupations, I should suppose old memories may become pleasant to him. He will forget the pain and remember the pleasures. But I only fancy, Violet; I tell you I know nothing whatever about his feelings for you. Some men like to speak; I let them, and then give them any advice or help I can. But some don’t; and Leicester is one. His feelings are very deep and very tender; and I know that, and

I never trouble him with questions which I know he don't like."

She was to hear no more. This was clear. No message had been left. Her trust drooped and died, and then sprang up again, catching at the hopes held out to her. Albert was honest. He would have told her she was forgotten if it was so ; he would not have said Leicester did not forget easily, unless he believed this to be a feature of his character. She would be brave, and hope, and trust ; and as she formed the resolution, new life seemed to come to her weary spirit. The six years of absence, of waiting and of expectation, seemed to melt away by the force of her new-born trust ; and when next she spoke, although it was still of the Leicesters, for she was determined to

know all she could, she spoke in a different tone. All that was personal had vanished; her resolution of constancy was formed, and to be kept in her secret heart alone. But interest might be expressed, and with interest and vivacity she led Albert on to talk, till the events of the last few months, such events as were connected with the Leicester family, were laid, in fragments indeed, but picturesque fragments, before her. She must make of these what she could, when she had time to think; but meanwhile there was *life* in the hearing of his name, and Albert scarcely understood his companion, nor the mother her daughter, when Violet cheerfully joined in the conversation of the evening.

CHAPTER XI.

“ Oh ! enviable fate to be
Strong, beautiful, and armed like thee,
With lyre and sword, with song and steel,
A hand to smite, a heart to feel.”

The Golden Legend.

THOUGH Albert's visit in some degree roused Violet, she remained an altered creature. She had to strive against vain longings, vain regrets, and at times that half-frenzy of self-condemnation, of marvel at her own rashness, and passionate desire to re-act one scene in her life, which leaves scars and traces on the soul. She set before her eyes a far-distant hope, and with the

power of youth, and the courage of a strong nature, the hope was a tangible thing. It brightened the distance, but it could not affect her daily tasks. *They* no longer were done in the light of that smile which she had so fondly pictured, as watching her in her daily course, and approving it. She was thus being taught better things; she was being insensibly raised and elevated; a better influence was stealing into her benevolence; it was all for good, and that she could acknowledge; but this conviction did not at the moment cheer her. She was depressed. Life had lost its spring time.

It was Ida's affection which first restored pleasantness to her daily tasks. Ida saw she was sad, and wondered why; but too gentle and tender to question, was satisfied

with exerting her own little arts to beguile her. One day she would draw her to a ramble in the beautiful country; another day to a drive; one day needed her help in some purchase, another day in paying a visit ordered by Sir William. Shortly, also, seeing that to do good was the passion of Violet's soul, she began to turn her own thoughts in that direction, and, unlocking little stores of money which her lonely life had taught her to hoard, begged Violet's help and counsel in distributing them to the poor of the neighbourhood. Though far from quick, love also made her observant; and when she had received in answer to her childish questions, "Why don't you live in a larger house?" and, "Why don't you have a carriage?" the short answer, "Because we can't afford it," she began to

consider what poverty was, and being unable to solve the problem, carried it to Lionel.

“What does Miss Osborne mean by can’t afford?”

“That she has not money enough.”

“But I thought all ladies had money.”

“Then you see as usual you made a mistake.”

“But if she is poor, how can she have such pretty clothes?”

“People may be poor without being beggars. Don’t be a goose.”

This was all the information Ida could obtain from Lionel in her perplexity; but though she could not fully understand, she received the fact that Violet was poor into her heart, and with quiet, watchful affection endeavoured to help her; espe-

cially in that line in which Violet was willing to receive help. Through her Sir William Hamilton was also drawn to interest himself in philanthropy; not indeed with personal exertions, but by allowing Ida to mention Violet's suggestions to him, and giving the useful help of money and the support of his name.

As fresh duties, therefore, opened upon her, Violet recovered some portion of her ardour, and the fact of Ida's affection—the clinging tenderness, and soft caresses, the admiration for herself, and the desire to be improved—was, without other causes, a help and consolation to her sore and disappointed heart.

Another motive was shortly afterwards presented to spur and reanimate the flickering but not exhausted fire of zeal.

About three months after Leicester's departure, Lionel Vane returned from a tour, and paid one of his short visits to Ashford Park.

Lord Ashford was absent, and finding his mother alone, he remained with her. In the day time he strolled to Boscombe, and while he sat and read in the shade, Ida detailed to him all the good designs which Violet had, and how much she hoped to help her. It was not Lionel's plan to show any deference to Ida, and as her talk was childish and insipid, he, while he allowed her to speak, allowed himself to abstract his attention. A difference, however, in the tone of her conversation on this visit, caught his ear, and without bestowing any greater show of deference, he did hear a considerable part of what she

said. Her talk was childish still, full of irrelevant particulars and tedious details ; but he was struck with the change of subject, and the higher flight even of the trifles that occupied her.

On one occasion he and Angel suddenly bounded into the schoolroom, and found Violet and Ida busily occupied in ruling large sheets of paper.

He apologized for his intrusion with his formal, manly manner, and then approaching the table, asked if he might inquire into their occupations.

Violet had lately heard of the now well-known institution called a " Penny Club ;" had, through Ida, brought it before Sir William's attention, and receiving his sanction to introduce it among his cottagers, was preparing the necessary papers for the

working of the plan. With some eagerness she explained it to Lionel, and with great eagerness he listened, and begged that the scheme might be extended to his father's property, undertaking in his own and his mother's name to supply the money required.

Violet neither acceded nor declined. She said he had better talk to Mr. Pope, and if her help was required, she would do what she could.

Her manner was not very gracious. Having settled in her mind that Lionel was not only a prig, but that he hated his father, she could not be cordial to him; and though unwilling to damp his desires of usefulness, she had no intention of placing herself at his orders.

He did not appear to notice her back-

wardness, and relaxing into his formal manner, asked a few questions and departed.

But in his lonely evenings with his mother he spoke much of Violet and her good works; the words he said agitated and excited the heart of the invalid; and one day she suddenly asked him whether he thought Miss Osborne could be prevailed on to visit her.

His eyes brightened. He loved his mother, and the thought of Violet's influence in cheering her solitude, was very grateful to him.

He promised to ask, and for the purpose called on her the following morning.

She gave a ready and gratified assent; it was settled that Lady Ashford should

let her know when the visit should take place, and that Ida should accompany her to the house.

“I hope you will like my poor mother,” he said, as he shook Violet’s hand, and the tone was one of such singular softness, that again her heart melted towards him.

Two days afterwards Ida brought her a note from Lionel, saying his mother would be ready to receive her at three on the day following, and at the appointed time they proceeded to Ashford Park.

The hall door was open. Ida went in without ringing the bell, and took Violet into the drawing-room, the door of which was also open.

It was not empty. Lord Ashford was looking out of the window. He turned

round at their entrance, and stared at Violet.

He was as unlike Lionel as it was possible for father and son to be; a tall, broad, handsome, well-made man; not naturally coarse, but with some such effect in his air and countenance from the life of dissipation he led. It was, however, a good-natured, jovial countenance, not without charm, and seemed properly to belong to "the jolly old lord."

Ida flew across the room when she caught sight of him.

"Oh! Uncle Ashford, are you come back?"

"Yes, my precious," he said, embracing her with warmth. "I came back last night. And how goes the world with you, and whom have we got here?" lower-

ing his voice, yet making the whisper audible.

“This is Miss Osborne, Uncle Ashford, who is so kind to me.”

“Is she? I hope she will be kind to me too. Good morning, Miss Osborne.”

He moved a few steps towards her, examining her air and countenance with no great respect.

Violet bowed, but remained silent.

“Come here, Ida,” he said playfully, “I have got something to say.” He put his mouth to her ear and whispered aloud, “Your kind friend is very handsome, but we must not let her hear what we say.” Violet coloured, on which he added, “Mind you never tell, my precious, because you know we must not make young ladies blush.”

Violet had been for a moment disconcerted, but she quickly recovered herself and said,

“I came here by Lady Ashford’s invitation. I believe she expects me. May I ring the bell, and send to tell her I am here?”

“By all means. Let me do it. Here, Thomas, go to my lady’s maid, and tell her Miss Osborne is here. So you did not bring your friend to see me, Miss Ida?”

“Oh! no, Uncle Ashford,” Ida said, imploringly, reading Violet’s annoyed expression of countenance.

“Then you behave very ill to me. Pray sit down, Miss Osborne. My lady is fanciful, and may keep you waiting. Come, Miss Ida, let us sit down together.”

He placed her like a little child on his knee, and fondly put his arm round her.

Violet was not kept waiting. Thomas returned in an instant with a request that she would go up-stairs, and she sprang up thankfully and followed him.

“Oh! Uncle Ashford!” Ida then said softly.

“Well, what now?”

“You shouldn’t,” with a gentle shake of her head.

“I tell you what, Miss Ida, your friend is very handsome, but I don’t like her. She’s one of your prim, set up saints. I can see that.”

“She is not. If she did not speak, it was because you stared, and you shouldn’t stare. It is not right.”

“Not right?” he cried, laughing heartily. “Why, what are our eyes made for?”

“To look with, not to stare,” Ida replied with one of her simple truisms.

“Well, I shan’t stare at her again. I don’t like her. She shall be my lady’s friend, and you shall be mine.”

Violet, meanwhile, was met on the stairs by an elderly maid, who led her at once, and without speaking, into Lady Ashford’s room.

Years of illness had banished from this room every trace of beauty or comfort. The chairs and tables were stiffly set against the wall or pushed into corners. All was clean and orderly, but there were not even the luxuries of illness. At one end of the room, on a white

sofa, in a white shawl, and covered over with a thin white counterpane, lay a white lady. A cap dazzlingly white, but simple almost as a nun's, confined her silver hair, and set as in a frame her sharp, colourless, tranquil features. It was Lionel's face, released from flesh and blood, and purified from every trace of passion or earthliness.

Violet stood still, awed by the sight before her, and it was not till a soft low voice said, "Will you not come near?" and a thin white hand was stretched out, that she ventured to approach.

The hand did not shake hands; when Violet drew near, it pointed to a chair at the foot of the sofa, and was concealed again.

"Thank you for coming; it is very

good of you," she then said, in the same low voice.

"I am glad to come," Violet replied. "I have so long wished to see you."

"And I to see you; but I feared it was wrong."

"How can it be wrong?" Violet forgot her awe in her surprise.

"I must not let earthly wishes rise again," and she crossed her arms on her breast and looked for a moment like a marble figure on an old tomb. "But you are come," she added, "and I have much to say."

Violet silently, but with curiosity, waited for her to speak. After a considerable pause of reflection she said—

"I have heard much of you, Miss Osborne, of all that in this short time you

have done, and 'all you intend to do among us. You are blessed; blessed in the good desires God has given you; and blessed that He also gives you the power to let them bear such fruit."

Violet's cheek glowed with pleasure and humility.

"You must not say such things to me," she said with great earnestness. "I do but little, and the little I do is very poorly done."

"It may seem so to you, it is not so in truth. God has made you good, and wise, and strong. Take warning by me," she continued with agitation, "and do not deny or waste the precious gifts He has poured on your head."

And unable from awe to answer this speech, Violet sat silent, and denied no more.

“Go on and prosper in the works you have undertaken in the world without; but that world has flitted from *me*; I know little of it now. I have other works for you to do. Will you undertake them?”

And her eyes gleamed like stars in her pale face.

“I will do what good I can in the world; it is my wish, it is my hope,” Violet cried.

She felt her heart strangely stirred. The forgotten zeal and fire had stolen back, and she was ready for any work, however hard.

“Then come nearer and let me give you my charge.”

Violet obeyed; and then fell from that quiet face, and those thin lips, excited words, while she detailed the scheme of

her son's marriage with Ida, asking Violet to consent to help it forward by all the means that might be put in her power.

It was not the work Violet had expected. It was not what she approved or desired, and when the excited words ceased, she sat silent.

"Do you refuse me?" Lady Ashford said in piteous accents.

"I do not refuse," Violet said gently, "but what can I do?"

"You can make her like yourself. You can make her good. Listen to me."

She slightly raised herself in her eagerness, and her low voice took a higher key and a tone of passion.

"There is a work for Ida to do in this house; it is hers, hers only. She has soft, loving, gentle ways, such as steal into men's

hearts, and she will do what I, alas! alas!" and a tear shot from her eye, "have left undone. There are other reasons too. She is *her* child."

Here she paused and sank back ; a faint flush stole over her cheek, and a something, it might be the last expiring pang of a jealous and wounded heart, contracted her features.

"I will do what I can," Violet murmured ; speaking that she might not seem to be gazing on the agonies of a bruised or broken spirit.

But Lady Ashford did not heed the interruption or appear conscious of the revelation she had made. After a short pause she again raised herself, and with a like eagerness continued—

"But there are dangers. Ida is not

all Lionel's wife should be. He is too like me. He cannot bear with the frailty of human nature, or have sympathy with those who are unlike him. He loves goodness—he has given his heart to it; and if Ida is weak and frail he never will love her. He strives, but he *cannot*. Will you teach her? Will you make her like yourself, holy and strong, not tossed with the wild whirls of passion? I say will *you* do it? I should rather say, will you pray for God's grace to add this good work to your other works? Will you promise?" and those gleaming eyes shone again like sparks of pale fire.

To be praised above our deserts, above the deserts which in self-complacency we have not rated cheaply, is a humbling thing, and never had Violet felt so truly

and sincerely lowly-minded as at this moment.

"I will do as you say," she replied at last, in hesitating accents. "I will pray that God will help me to do good to Ida while we are together. She must not be like me, for I am not what you think, but I will try to show her what is good, as I try to learn it myself."

"It is all I ask," and Lady Ashford sank back, and closed her eyes in exhaustion.

Violet waited; then becoming alarmed at the deadly paleness and long silence, rose and moved.

At the movement Lady Ashford languidly re-opened her eyes, and put out her hand.

"My spirit is anxious still, but my flesh

is weak. I can say no more. God bless you !”

Violet took the hand stretched out and said :

“I will come again if I may. May I come again ?”

“No, Miss Osborne. This earthly heart, these earthborn cares, must not weigh me down again. I have yielded to my wild longing to speak. I pray God it was not sinful ; but I am too earthly yet. If I rest my wing once more on the world’s waters I shall never get free. Fare you well, and God be with you !”

But Violet had scarcely released the hand she kissed, when Lady Ashford sprang up again, again seized her, and again with shining eyes spoke.

“I had forgotten ; if ever you have the

opportunity, whether I am alive or whether I am dead, will you persuade my son to be more at home? He, too, has his work, and it is not safe to separate ourselves from it. I may have done it, alas! alas! Let him take warning, and be wise in time."

"Will he not mind his mother's words more than mine?" Violet said very gently, annoyed at the request.

"Tell him they are mine. Tell him so when I am dead. Tell him then, once, twice, thrice, if you can. It is for *me* he acts as he does, and I have no power to persuade; but *you* will do it. I leave my last request with you."

She did not wait for an answer, and Violet was thankful. Nothing further passed. Lady Ashford lay back as one dead, and she softly left the room.

She went down to the drawing-room, and finding it empty, sat still and thoughtful, reflecting on all that had passed.

Very shortly Ida and Lord Ashford returned hand in hand, talking lovingly as they walked, Ida laden with a Dresden bird, the gift of the hour. It was plain that Lady Ashford was right. Ida had the gift of stealing into one man's heart.

Though Violet rose on their entrance, her thoughtful attitude, and the soft pensiveness of her countenance, did not escape Lord Ashford. It caught an eye quick to see, and it struck on a conscience, not quick, but not dead. He was nettled, and cried with freedom yet bitterness—

“Well, Miss Osborne, what plot has my lady been hatching against me? I own

I wonder she could trust *you* to execute it."

"Violet's heart was very full of the forlorn wife, the forlorn, wounded, neglected being from whom she had just parted, and his levity revolted her feelings as well as offended her taste. She took no notice of his speech, but said to Ida—

"If you are ready, Ida, it is full time for me to go home."

"Then go, my precious," Lord Ashford said, kissing her, and moving her towards Violet. "Don't let us detain Miss Osborne," he continued, "for you see though kind to you, she won't be kind to me. Good morning, Miss Osborne." He bowed coldly, but the next instant relented, held out his hand, and with a smile kindly and repentant, though his

words were not without bitterness, added, "I beg pardon for all offences, and if you are not too much a saint to forgive, let us in all Christian charity shake hands."

Violet gave her hand readily, though coldly, and then, followed by Ida, hastened away.

She walked along thoughtfully still. Not Lord Ashford, nor yet Lionel, was in her thoughts; she was occupied with the question, "How was it that one whose aims were so high, whose wishes so strong and so holy, had been doomed to disappointment and failure, having scarcely the power, as it seemed, to influence even the son who adored her?"

It was only when, as they passed the gates of Ashford Park, and Lionel appeared,

that her thoughts reverted to him, and she became conscious, partly conscious, of a change in her feelings towards him. She had taken an antipathy to Lord Ashford, and therefore—not a logical therefore, but a therefore common to human nature—she had gone over to Lionel's side. She was become more or less a partisan.

He came towards her with eagerness.

“You have been very good, Miss Osborne. Thank you in my own, and my poor mother's name, a thousand times.”

“I will not be thanked for what gives me pleasure,” she said playfully; then seriously, “It is I who have to thank Lady Ashford. I shall not soon forget her.”

"I hope not. I hope you will visit her soon again, and often."

"I would with joy; but she will not allow it."

"Ah!" he said sadly, but with vexation, "my poor mother! I had hoped to think of you near her while I am away."

"Are you going?" said both Violet and Ida; Violet with quiet, Ida with eager regret. Violet was thinking of his mother's wish.

"Yes, for a year. I am going to Egypt and the Holy Land. I met you to wish you good-bye. I intend to set off to-morrow morning, Good-bye, Ida."

"Good-bye, Lionel," she said sadly and softly, and raised her face and stood on her tiptoes to kiss him.

“My dear Ida,” he cried, drawing back disdainfully, “do learn to give up such babyish ways, here in the high road, too !”

Violet could scarcely help laughing at his annoyed air, but she stood demurely by while Ida justified herself.

“When you are going for a *whole* year I thought I might. I am very sorry. Good-bye, dear Lionel.”

“Well, never mind this time, but do remember you are growing old. Good-bye, Miss Osborne. I hope prosperity will attend all your exertions.”

This was said with the old formal manner, and on other occasions would have impelled Violet to “set him down,” but she was now on his side, and she bore with his ways calmly.

They parted, and she and Ida hurried to the cottage, where a maid was waiting to take Ida home.

CHAPTER XII.

“ Death took away King Herod in his pride,
Death spared not Hercules for all his strength,
Death shooke great Alexander till he dye'd,
Death spared Adam, yet he dye'd at length.
The beggar and the king together lie,
Nothing more sure than death, for all must die.”

From old verses, 1696.

SEVERAL years, upwards of four, of Violet's life slipped quietly by. The Osbornes remained and took root in their new country. Two visits to friends near London, and one change of thirty miles for the benefit of sea-air for Mrs. Osborne, were the only varieties of those four years. The small

way of living, and the cheapness of the country, enabled Mr. Osborne to live in comfort at his tiny home; but there was no elasticity in the income; no secret funds to meet the expensive pleasures of travelling. With equanimity he bore his fate. His wife did not bear, but enjoyed it. The calm quiet country existence was healthful to the nerves of the deaf woman, and she renewed her youth under its influence. For Violet, it is hard to find a word expressive of her state of mind. She was too busy in the present, too absorbed in a single hope to have time for musing or brooding, and though happy, or contented, were not words exactly suitable to her life of restless activity, she was upon the whole content and cheerful. A malady she had—a heart-ache—never entirely cured,

and at times assailing her with violence; but youth and hope, and, as years flowed on, the knowledge that Leicester was still unmarried, carried her through, and in her home she was almost as bright and joyous as in the days of her opening youth.

Very few events marked these years. One or two must be mentioned.

The year after Violet's visit to Ashford Park Lady Ashford died. Possibly there had been a decline step by step to the end, but no news of such decline had got abroad, and her death was a surprise. Her son was far away. Her husband was near at hand, but absent. She slipped out of life unattended as she had lived.

One morning she quietly observed to her maid, "This will be my last day. Is

my lord at home?" On receiving a negative she sighed; then added, "Mr. Pope must be sent for," but before he arrived she had tranquilly closed her eyes on earthly troubles.

The death of this poor lady made a sensation in the parish. She had so hidden herself; in rigid self-denial, had so hidden even her charities from view, that she had been forgotten, and when she died, rich and poor felt qualms of conscience in their forgetfulness. None suffered under this self-reproach more keenly than Mr. Pope. When he looked on the calm and holy face, from which life had just departed, he was touched; though he did not charge himself with neglect, for she had never seemed to court his visits, he did with contempt, and he resolved to do her all

the honour remaining in his power by preaching a sermon on her death.

Having thus resolved, he was too heroic to give way under difficulties; but difficulty he certainly felt on the occasion. He could not hold her out as an example, for he had not admired and did not admire her character, or wish it to be imitated. There was a lesson of warning indeed to be drawn from some part of her conduct, but still less could this be dwelt on to the villagers. To preach on death might be easy, but then death was not a new subject, and he wished to distinguish her and himself on the occasion.

The moment of inspiration came at last. It was *Lady* Ashford who had died; in her beautiful home, and with, had she pleased, all the luxuries of life, she still

had died. This was the subject that seized on and approved itself even to his aristocratic mind. Death as the leveller. And whether with the elation of a new thought or that his mind was really touched and kindled by the circumstance of her death, he made a very fine sermon.

That his wife should say, "I don't know where you get your thoughts," was not much; but that Mr. Osborne should disrespectfully observe to Violet, "I never expected to feel so little sleepy under Pope's discourses," was a tribute more valuable. His triumph, however, was among the poor. They talked it over with rapture for a month at least.

"Ah! Jane," said an old almshouse woman to her bedridden companion, "we had a terrible sermon from Master Pope,"

and then in a few concise words she gave an epitome of the sermon. "When death comes to take us by the clutches, it will never do to say, I be my lord or my lady, or I be a king on my throne. Death must have his wull. He be a terrible grand thing that Death. Nothing on earth be so great as he."

"But God is greater," said Jane, somewhat scandalized.

"Ay, ay, but God be in heaven, and death bean't *there*, thank the Lord."

Lord Ashford returned in the evening of the day of his wife's death, and found her dead.

That he should feel grief was impossible; but he, too, felt a qualm of conscience, and would have given much to have been able to murmur "Pardon me" in her

dying ear. But the shock passed by—the troubled conscience was stilled, and she was forgotten.

Mr. Pope wrote to Lionel, but though he had returned from the East and was rambling about in Holland and Germany, his movements were so uncertain that it was three weeks before he heard the news. He came home with a speed for which there was now no cause, and shut himself up alone. There was a rumour that at nightfall he stole out to his mother's grave; but in the daytime he was unseen, and he suffered no intrusion on his solitude.

Mr. Pope, always desirous to do his duty, wrote to offer a visit of condolence, and enclosed his sermon as a peacemaker. But Lionel had resented Mr. Pope's friend-

ship with his father, and comparative neglect of his mother, and resentment was not forgotten now. With a few words of cold thanks, and scarcely warmer approval, he returned the sermon, and declined the visit, and remained alone and comfortless.

Ida's tender heart bled, and she implored permission to go to him; but Sir William Hamilton, more discerning than his daughter, had perceived that Lionel resented any forwardness on Ida's part, and now, as usual, refused to allow her to seek him out.

About ten days after his return she was, however, gratified by the sight of him. She and Violet were returning late from a small hamlet, to the special care of which Violet was directing Ida's attention, when they saw him on the opposite side of a

hedge. *They* were in one of the meadows of Boscombe; he was in Ashford Park. Ida grasped Violet's arm and pointed him out; but no sound was made and they walked on for a time in silence, uncertain whether he perceived or intended to notice them. At length a kind of gate at the end of the hedge was reached, and Lionel suddenly and lightly vaulting over it stood before them.

His pale, distressed countenance, and the sight of his deep mourning, overcame Ida, and, springing forward, she threw herself into his arms, sobbing out:

“Oh! my dearest Lionel, I am so sorry for you!”

As she was now a tall girl of thirteen, Lionel's strictures on this behaviour might have been reasonable, but he was too agi-

tated to think of them now. Far from repelling, he held her hand, crushing it in his own while he endeavoured to master himself.

When he had calmed himself as best he could, he let go her hand, and, advancing slightly, shook hands with Violet.

"Ida has been hoping to see you," Violet said, speaking to relieve the awkwardness of the moment.

"I wished to see her, too, before I went. I have walked here several evenings. I knew you went often to Little Boscombe, and I thought I should meet you."

There was a pause, and then Ida looked up sorrowfully.

"Are you going again, Lionel?"

"Yes. I only waited to see you."

"Are you going for long?"

"Yes, for some years, I think."

“For some years!” echoed both Violet and Ida.

At Violet’s exclamation he turned towards her, and said fiercely—

“Yes, for years. Why should I not? What tie have I got to keep me at home?”

“I thought you knew your mother wished you to live at home,” Violet said in a low voice.

A hundred times at least she had debated with herself whether the message left with her should be given, and a hundred times her sober judgment had told her that it was not a matter in which she was likely to do good, or in which it was wise for her to interfere. But her impulse was stronger than her judgment, and on the impulse of the moment she spoke.

“How do you know she wished it?” he said eagerly.

“She told me so in that one visit. She left, indeed, a kind of message for you.”

“A message!” he cried excitedly. “Ida, leave us for a moment. I wish to speak to Miss Osborne alone.”

Ida stole back along the hedge idly picking out the wild flowers, and Violet also moved, repenting of the impulse that had led her to speak.

But he stood still and requested, almost commanded, her to repeat what had been said.

She did so as nearly as possible in the very words that had been used, giving to them all the force and pathos in her power.

His agitation frightened her. Tears sprang into his eyes, and he clenched and unclenched his hands several times, as if in a vain effort to restrain himself. But it was not the agitation of tenderness. When he spoke his words were fiery and resentful.

“You do not know what you ask. If you did know—if you could but guess the course of conduct which has driven my poor angel mother into an early grave—you would not ask, you would not dare to ask of her son to forgive.”

“I ask nothing,” Violet said gently. “I have told you the words that were said to me; but you know your duty far too well for me to wish to influence you, even had I the right to do so.”

“There are cases when duty is at war with duty. I have a duty to my dear lost mother, and that dissolves the common duty of a son to his father. In my mind he is little better than her murderer; he shall not be a father to me, nor will I live with him as his son.”

Violet was shocked and alarmed at the violence of his language and countenance; but though shocked she was interested. It was the revelation of a character, some ingredients of which she had suspected lay under his formal manners, but the full development of which astonished her.

She made one more effort.

“Your mother spoke of faults on her part, faults of judgment which had been committed, which partly excused . . . which at least explained . . . I hardly know

how to express myself, but you should not forget what she said. She in her quietness was a better judge of what duty is than you can be in your excitement. But I can say no more. It is for you to think over her words and decide. Ida," and she slightly raised her voice and beckoned with her hand.

Ida returned, slowly gazing at Lionel, to see if she had permission to return.

"I have shocked you," he said. "Forgive me. You can hardly guess what my feelings are on that subject. I wish I could be guided by you, but I cannot."

Violet made no answer, but when Ida reached them, held out her hand and said—

"We must wish you good-bye, then."

He shook her hand silently, and draw-

ing Ida a little apart, whispered to her for two or three seconds ; when he released her, with a condescension never before exhibited, and probably in his agitated state unconsciously shewn, he kissed her cheek. He then vaulted over the gate and disappeared.

Ida walked along for a short distance, crying silently. Violet's mind during that short time was more occupied with curiosity than with any other subject. She was by nature curious, and she did feel desirous to know the subject of that private communication. No excess of curiosity would, however, have allowed her to ask a question on the subject, and she was unexpectedly relieved by Ida's remark.

“ Do you know what Lionel said to me,

Violet?" drying her eyes, and looking up, ready for conversation.

"No, indeed. How could I guess?"

"I thought perhaps he told you. He asked me to go and see Uncle Ashford very often, and to be a kind of a daughter to him, as he cannot be his son."

Violet saw in this request the endeavour to stifle a prompting of conscience.

"Well, Ida, you must try and do as he wishes," she replied. "It cannot be the same thing, but you may be of a little use."

"I wish Lionel liked Uncle Ashford better," Ida next said sadly. "And Uncle Ashford, too, I wish he liked Lionel."

"I wish so, too. But we will not talk

about such things. It seems so shocking for a son not to love his father."

"I think Lionel would if he could, and I think Uncle Ashford would if he could," was Ida's charitable comment.

"Ah! but, Ida, real goodness is to do more than we can. I am afraid saying 'we can't' is no good excuse;" and having instilled her moral lesson, Violet changed the subject, and endeavoured to divert Ida's mind.

Another event, or more properly circumstance, for it could not be dignified with the name of an event, occurred about two years afterwards. This was a disappointment which came to Violet in the person of Amy White. As her conduct on the occasion gave rise to some further circumstances, it must not be passed over.

No one could have toiled more unceasingly than Violet had to prevent Amy from sinking in the scale of society by the occupation she followed. No one could have toiled more earnestly, by society, advice, and guidance, to elevate and refine her mind, that she might thereby prevent herself from sinking. But some minds will not be elevated, and some persons cannot rise above the level in which their daily duty lies. It was thus with Amy. She worshipped Violet, and for her sake did strive to maintain a position above her occupation; but it was wearying to her, and the effort was not strong enough to withstand a temptation.

Violet one day accompanied Ida to the neighbouring town for a visit to a dentist. Ida suffered a good deal, and their return

was late. About two miles from Holywell, Violet observed on the footpath a young man and a young woman walking arm-in-arm, and though, as they passed, the young woman was closely veiled, she had no difficulty in recognising Amy White. The young man, she thought, was a grocer in the town from whence she was returning, but of this she could not be sure. Ida was reclining backwards in great pain, and saw neither the sight, nor the more remarkable sight of Violet's crimson, indignant, astonished, ashamed countenance.

Nothing was said of what she had seen, but the following morning she hastened to Amy for an explanation.

Poor Amy, with many tears, confessed that the young man *was* her lover, *was*

the grocer, and that she had given him considerable encouragement.

"Then you mean to marry him," Violet said, in stern astonishment.

Amy was silent. Somewhat imperiously she repeated the question.

"I hardly know," Amy said hesitatingly. "Sometimes I think I won't; and then I think it will be a happy thing for my mother and me to be provided for all our days."

"But that is so low a view of marriage," Violet said warmly. "Have you considered all the case? Do you, can you love him?"

"I think he loves me," was the evasive reply, "for he is rich, rich compared to us, and I am poor, and yet he is willing to have me."

“Willing to have you,” Violet repeated, in ill-suppressed contempt. “My dear Amy, do you consider what you say and what you are doing? Give yourself to a grocer because he is willing to have you though you are poor. My dear Amy, is it possible you can reason in such a way.”

Amy looked ashamed, but made no defence. Violet went on after a moment more calmly.

“Do not suppose I would say a word against a young man because he is a grocer. It is a most useful and respectable business, and if he chooses a fitting wife, I daresay she will be a very happy woman. But I cannot fancy you, Amy, behind a counter”

“He says he will never ask it,” Amy burst in eagerly.

“Then I think him very nonsensical,” was Violet’s decided reply. “Husbands and wives ought to help each other, and if a grocer has a fine wife who will not exert herself, or show herself, they will both be miserable. Depend upon it, Amy, I am right and you are wrong. You were born a lady, and though you have suffered much, you have never yet lowered yourself; you do not know what you will feel when you have taken a step which condemns you for *life* to different society. Depend upon it you will repent, and bitterly.”

Amy worshipped Violet, and these and many other arguments, poured out during an hour’s conversation, induced her to give up the proposed connection.

But when the deed was done, she re-

pented, and bitterly. The pleasant excitement of the courtship was no more. Her mother, though she had grumbled at the idea of such a marriage, grumbled still more when she found it was not to be, and made her home for some weeks a torment. Could it have been possible she would have lured the lover back. But he was not to be allured. He had behaved, as he justly thought, handsomely, and he had been treated, as he justly thought, unjustly. He was stung and piqued, and after a few weeks transferred his attentions to a handsome bustling young woman, the very opposite to Amy, and exactly fitted to be a rising grocer's wife.

Violet's arguments had been true, and her advice sound. With many characters

her interference might have been useful. But Amy was helplessly weak; her sentiments on love and marriage were not high, and from this time Violet began to perceive that her cares had been thrown away, and sometimes to grieve that she had not allowed Amy's affairs to take their own natural course, unbiassed by her arguments and wishes.

A third event was the coming of age of Lionel Vane. He came home on the occasion to sign some papers; but a disagreement sprang up with his father; excited words were spoken, and in two or three days he had again betaken himself to his wandering life.

The disagreement was not with regard to money arrangements. Lionel was willing to do all his father wished in that respect.

It regarded a bequest of Lady Ashford's to a specified religious society. The bequest was left in humble words, "Should my husband and my son, when he comes of age, approve." Now Lord Ashford did not approve, and had this argument on his side, that since Lady Ashford's death the society in question had been brought somewhat conspicuously before the public, owing to fraudulent practices in one of the managers. But with Lionel his mother's wish was sacred, and perhaps all the more sacred from his father's opposition. Neither would yield, and they parted in displeasure.

It was unfortunate. Lord Ashford, since his wife's death, had been sobering and improving. There was no show or talk of improvement, perhaps no consciousness

of it, but he was becoming quieter, and was beginning to look forward with hope and pleasure to the time when Ida, as Lionel's wife, would make him a comfortable and peaceful home. Lionel could not know this fact. There was no one to tell him of any change; and his visit was too short to allow of any such observation from his own eyes. But some ignorances are in themselves faults, and some eyes are blindfolded by their own hands.

He paid a short visit to Ida on this occasion, and though angry with his father, he still encouraged *her* to be with him, and make herself as a daughter. An injunction scrupulously fulfilled, as far as Sir William Hamilton permitted it.

CHAPTER XIII.

“A blooming lady, a conspicuous flower,
Admired for her beauty, for her sweetness praised ;
Whom he had sensibility to love,
Ambition to attempt. . . .”

The Excursion.

FIVE years of Leicester's banishment had expired. Violet was verging on five and twenty, and Ida Hamilton on seventeen.

Among Violet's many disappointments, and she naturally had many besides the one just related, she had one success so great that she herself marvelled at it. There are soils so fruitful, hearts so honest

and good, that every seed of advice cast upon them, springing up, bears fruit a hundred fold. And such was the soil of Ida's nature. With very real, with very conscientious effort and determination, Violet had endeavoured to the best of her power to instil good thoughts and give firm principles of action. She knew she had done this, and yet knew also how far below her desires her efforts and powers had been. She was, therefore, astonished at the reproduction in Ida of all that was best in herself. But Violet could not estimate the value of her own society, of her own *good* heart, acting on another. It was this far more than the conscious teaching which had transformed the soft and loving but feeble character of her young companion into one which, but for

the natural and inevitable infirmities of human nature, was almost faultless. Violet could not give to the intellect the vigour which did not exist; but she gave what was more valuable, the moral atmosphere of truth, and sense, and kindliness, and clear sight of the distinction between right and wrong. That atmosphere in which she herself lived and moved, which encompassed her without her knowledge, and breathed in every word she heard, flowing from her, became to Ida the atmosphere of her life. She drank it in, and, with the unconscious mimicry of affection, and the settled purpose of admiration, imitated Violet in thought and word and deed.

Manners and appearances had not lost ground while her moral nature improved, and she was as she approached seventeen

one whom a man, supposing him ever to be content to have his marriage arranged, might have been more than content, might have been grateful, to see allotted to his share.

The charms of his daughter were not lost on Sir William. He saw them ; acknowledged to whom a considerable share of her merits and graces were due, and repaid Violet with a coin for which she was unprepared.

During the last two years he had been in some degree emerging from his retirement. The interest which Violet had stirred in Ida's heart for her father's tenantry re-acted upon him ; and though his habits of seclusion were too strong to be readily broken, he suffered himself to be drawn into interest, reflection, and

liberality. Perhaps the spell exercised upon him was the same as that which was exercised upon his daughter, and that he yielded to interest simply that he might draw near, where he wished to draw near. Be this as it may, whether first interest in his people then in Violet, or the reverse, was stirred up, certain it is that both effects were produced ; and building in secret on a future hope, he watched his time and opportunity to make those hopes apparent.

This was not easy. He was too keensighted not to perceive that his appearance, except at rare intervals, in his own home, would put an end to the intimacy between Violet and his daughter. This he therefore rarely permitted himself. Violet

came and went unmolested by any thought of him.

The only ground on which he occasionally allowed himself a meeting, was in his pauper hamlet of Little Boscombe. This was one of those neglected spots—a population settling there, none knowing how or whence, with poverty like Irish poverty, and habits wild and gipsy-like—such as is sometimes to be found on the skirts of heaths in the south of England.

Here he occasionally met his daughter, to inspect the progress of works designed, or to plan new ones, and Violet was often present; her practical sense making itself felt, not only to Sir William, who saw her through charmed eyes, but to his man of all work, a sharp, shrewd north-

country steward, who, though not unwilling to do good to man in general, was especially desirous of doing good to his employer.

After a certain number of these meetings had taken place, her opinion had been deferentially listened to, and her wishes acquiesced in, Sir William thought the time was come when he might make an advance. When he had first felt the impulse to make Violet Lady Hamilton, he had decided on waiting till his daughter was Mrs. Vane; but Lionel's wilfulness made the prospect a doubtful and distant one. He then decided that he would wait until Ida was seventeen; but so it was that the more he considered the future before him, the more alluring the prospect became, and suddenly, when the

seventeenth birthday was still four months distant, he said he could wait no longer and the deed should be done.

Ida had a cold, and after paying her an afternoon visit, Violet set off one day about this time to walk home alone.

Sir William had expected it would be thus, for though his carriage was always at her disposal, Violet's habits were too free and independent to allow her often to make use of it.

As she emerged from the shrubbery into the park she saw Sir William coming. Being always in haste, she was always sorry to be detained; but otherwise, whether or not she met him, was a matter of indifference to her.

As was usual on the rare occasions when they chanced thus to meet, she stopped and

said a few words, but before she could hurry on, he observed,

“May I speak a few words with you?”

It was said in the grave, shy manner which was common to him, and though inwardly fretting at the delay, Violet acquiesced without suspicion and with civility.

He began by thanking her for the improvement in Ida, praising his daughter with well-merited and discriminating praise, and then observing that he allowed himself the indulgence of praise because the work of having made her what she was, was Violet's own.

Violet was gratified. Though disclaiming any excess of praise, she was conscious of having done her very best, and she was too honest not to show the pleasure caused

by an appreciation of her pains. Her smile was bright, and her thanks for his words frank, modest, and ingenuous.

Charmed by her reception of his opening speech, Sir William lost his diffidence, and in the very next sentence began to pour out before her his hopes, and to offer to her acceptance himself and all his worldly goods.

Though his words were tolerably plain and straightforward, and though it is said a woman is seldom taken by surprise, Violet's perceptions on the occasion were so dull that he spoke for some moments before even a glimmer of dismayed comprehension shot through her brain, and even then, though her colour rose, and her breath came short, she was still so uncertain whether he might not be speaking of

Lionel and Ida, that she was afraid to seem quick of comprehension.

When, however, she could doubt no longer, she stopped, and with warmth begged him to be silent. Shame, anger, and mortification for a few moments raged within. There was no reason possibly for anger at this tribute to her attractions, but Violet's feelings were quick, and she was so mortified at having been misunderstood, at the idea having presented itself to his mind, that she could not argue or restrain herself, and spoke her feelings as they rose.

But when she saw *his* mortification and disappointment, she relented, and instead of hurrying on as she had intended, she endeavoured with slackened steps and gentle words to soothe the wound she had

inflicted. She told him in plain terms that to win her was *impossible*, leaving him to infer the reason why, and then expressed her regrets in language so kind, that, though his disappointment was great, Sir William allowed himself to be soothed.

Before they parted he begged of her to allow the late conversation to remain a secret. He was not speaking, he said, of her parents, but of the neighbourhood.

“He could not suppose,” Violet interrupted quickly, “that she would.”

“No,” he said, interrupting in his turn, “he merely wished to point out that any change of her habits, any backwardness in visiting his house and his daughter, would inevitably give rise to those observations he was earnestly desirous to avoid. He

could assure her on his honour as a gentleman, that he would molest or offend her no more."

Violet gave a hurried but ready promise that she would do as he wished, and then agitated and breathless hastened homewards. When out of sight of *his* mortification her own returned in full force, and had her parents been at home, to them her heart would have been poured out. But they had gone out for an evening stroll, and returned only in time for Mr. Osborne to be anxious for dinner. During the evening shame—the shame of having been treated like a common young lady—kept her silent; and when Mrs. Osborne said she was tired, and went early to bed, the last chance of confession escaped her. Before morning the dutiful impulse which had

made her feel the secret to be her parents' right, had yielded to the wisdom of second thoughts. These second thoughts were very wise. How, she asked herself, could she keep her promise of secrecy to Sir William if her parents objected to a continuance of her present footing in his house? and how, if there was a change, could she escape the observations of Mr. Pope, of Ida, of Lionel Vane, &c.; and at the thought, and from dread of the observations that might be made, her cheek burned, her nature shrank, and her decision was taken to bury the past in the oblivion he desired.

A few days afterwards she met Sir William when walking to Boscombe in company with her father; and the thankfulness she felt at escaping his arch looks on the occasion made her applaud the wisdom of

her decision. As it was, a slight blush on her cheek, and a slight degree of added shyness on his part, was all the awkwardness that was visible; and having no suspicions, these slight signs were unperceived by Mr. Osborne. Sir William seemed anxious to re-establish a friendly footing, and became almost loquacious. He twice observed, "That though the weather was sultry, he thought it would rain," and instead of hurrying on after these two remarks, paused and said,

"Have you heard that Lionel Vane is about to return home?"

"No, indeed," said Mr. Osborne, who liked a piece of news of whatever kind. "Is it true? I saw Pope just now, and he had heard nothing of it; that makes it doubtful, does it not?"

"It is true, I imagine. Macadam told me he had heard it this morning from Lord Ashford's steward."

"Then I suppose it must be true," Mr. Osborne observed.

Sir William agreed, and having now done his best to re-assure Violet, took his leave and walked on.

"Bless Sir William!" exclaimed Mr. Osborne, "actually a piece of news. What can have inspired him?"

"It is not *news* to him," Violet inadvertently replied. "It is probably an interesting fact."

"Why? How so? Do you believe the tale I hear, that Miss Hamilton is destined for him?" Then without waiting for an answer, he continued, "I wish your pretty friend a better fate."

“I don’t see that, papa. I am sure by all I hear of the world, Mr. Vane is a thousand times better than most young men. He may have faults, but he has not bad faults.”

“Well, darling, I disagree with you. It is not a thing I like to say, but I do feel that I would rather see a youth with faults, and what you call bad faults, than see him an undutiful son. Where there is no heart, and no practice of the first of duties, I have very little admiration for a *faultless* character.”

Mr. Osborne spoke with warmth, and with warmth Violet replied.

“No heart, papa! an undutiful son! Oh! how you misjudge.”

“Do I, darling? Tell me how? I forgot that Lionel Vane was under your protection.”

"I only mean that you must make allowance for what seems undutifulness to one parent, by remembering what he feels about another. Mr. Vane adored his mother, and he did not, and I suppose cannot, forgive the neglect that hurried her to her grave. Very likely he is wrong; but I feel that if *you* behaved so to mamma, I should be as undutiful to you."

"Should you, darling?" he cried, laughing merrily, as he looked into her eager face; "well, then, I am sure I must be wrong, and Mr. Vane is in the right. And now that he really is coming home, I daresay he will win golden opinions from me and all other people. We will hope so, at any rate."

Lionel Vane returned. He was brought

home by a letter from Lord Ashford. As has been said, Lord Ashford was becoming anxious for society at home; not so much the society of his son as his son's wife. He, like others, had been struck with the improvement in Ida, and feeling a conviction that if Lionel saw her the plans regarding their future life would come to a crisis, he wrote to request his return. He knew, however, that a request was not enough; he made a sacrifice; and the subject of his letter was the withdrawing of his opposition to the payment of Lady Ashford's bequest.

Lionel was touched. He was too certain he was in the right to have any qualms at his own behaviour on the occasion of their last strife, but he was touched by his father's advances toward a reconcilia-

tion, and being very desirous to return, accepted at once the propitiation offered.

On the morning of the day of his return, as Violet returned from her music lesson in the church, she met Mr. Pope and Lord Ashford. They turned and walked with her.

“My good friend here,” observed Lord Ashford, “has been endeavouring to bribe me to my duty by promising me a musical treat. Whether or no there is anything very righteous in being bribed to church, I cannot tell, but I was coming beforehand to hear the treat in question. We are too late, I fear.”

Violet had rarely met Lord Ashford since the day on which they seemed to take a mutual antipathy, and when they did meet no progress towards a better understand-

ing had been made. Unwilling, however, in her benevolence to damp good wishes of any kind, she answered graciously that her mother was not well, which had been the cause of the lesson being shorter than usual; she hoped he would repeat his visit another day.

“We are getting on very well, are we not, Mr. Pope? and a little praise encourages us all.”

Mr. Pope gave his cordial acquiescence, and they walked on. It very shortly occurred to Violet that Lord Ashford wished to speak to her; but if it were so, Mr. Pope, having no such suspicion, prevented speech by walking and talking unceasingly. He showed off Violet to Lord Ashford, and Lord Ashford to Violet, and himself to both; and so boasting, they all reached the Cottage.

“Is your mother too unwell for a visit?”
Lord Ashford inquired.

And more than ever convinced he had something to say, Violet entered the house and said she would see.

Her mother was lying down, but she found her father, and he came out. Unceremoniously turning from him, however, Lord Ashford said to Violet—

“I have never seen your drawing-room, may I look in?”

And scarcely waiting for permission, entered the house.

Violet followed, and he, without seeming to perceive that Mr. Osborne and Mr. Pope were also following, closed the door and said—

“I have but a moment. I know from Ida that you are acquainted with our

schemes—Sir William's and mine—and I wish to ask your assistance in bringing them to a right conclusion. I think you will be doing a good work."

Mr. Pope was not to be kept out, and before Violet could answer, he and Mr. Osborne entered, and a general conversation for a few minutes followed.

Before his departure, however, Lord Ashford found a moment to add,

"Did you understand me? I think you will have influence! Will you do what you can?"

"I do not like it," Violet said hesitatingly; "but as things have gone so far, I think I may promise that I will do anything I can, anything I ought"

"That will do. Thank you," and he departed.

“What was that, Violet?” said her father, returning as soon as he had attended his visitors to the cottage gate. “What did Lord Ashford want, and what did you say you would do as much as you ought?”

It was from her father probably that Violet inherited the curiosity which was so marked a feature in her character.

She was for a moment perplexed how to answer, then said frankly and playfully,

“A secret, papa! To punish you for listening, I shall not tell you what it is; and I must also own that if you had not listened, I still should not have told.”

“A secret between you and Lord Ashford, darling! Why, this is a new friendship, is it not?”

“Rather new. It was formed as we walked from the church this morning.”

“And you have a real secret?”

“Yes, papa; and I have two or three others, and I can’t tell you anything about them, and you must not ask me.” And she kissed him, not coaxingly, but with an air of playful authority.

“Well, well, in my day” he murmured, a little rebelliously; not that he had any doubts or fears about Violet’s secrets, but that the poor man was suffering from an attack of curiosity as to what Lord Ashford *could* have said.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.







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